

THE BOOK OF SECRETS

A Netbook for the **Ravenloft**
and **Gothic Earth** Settings

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Notes from the Kargatane:

All submissions have been edited to use Americanized spelling. This was done simply to give **THE BOOK OF SECRETS** a more coherent appearance, and should not be meant as a slight against our Anglicized authors.

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And I cried—"It was surely October
On this very night of last year
That I journeyed—I journeyed down here—
That I brought a dread burden down here—
On this night of all nights in the year,
Oh, what demon has tempted me here?
Well I know, now, this dim lake of Auber—
This misty mid region of Weir—
Well I know, now, this dank tarn of Auber—
In the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir."

Said we, then—the two, then—"Ah, can it
Have been that the woodlandish ghouls—
The pitiful, the merciful ghouls—
To bar up our way and to ban it
From the secret that lies in these wolds—
From the thing that lies hidden in these wolds—
Had drawn up the spectre of a planet
From the limbo of lunary souls—
This sinfully scintillant planet
From the Hell of the planetary souls?"

—Edgar Allen Poe
To ———. Ulalume: A Ballad

BOOK OF SORROWS: PREFACE

The first step towards vice is to shroud innocent actions in mystery, and whoever likes to conceal something sooner or later has reason to conceal it. - Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Secrets by their very nature are an effectual contrivance of horror. Ever since Horace Walpole first penned *The Castle of Otranto*, the secret has been a cornerstone of the Gothic genre that has grown into the horror literature we know and love today. Secrets can be extremely dangerous, whether they remain hidden or are inopportunately revealed. It should be no surprise that the Demiplane of Dread is a land of many secrets.

The Kargatane are pleased to present the third annual Ravenloft Netbook, *The Book of Secrets*. Herein lie the secrets of many talented *Ravenloft*® and *Masque of the Red Death*® fans. We have dutifully collected their secrets for several months, and now choose to reveal them to you on this darkest of nights.

In the pages that follow, you will find many secrets of the Demiplane of Dread and Gothic Earth revealed. Now you must ask yourself, “are these secrets I keep, or secrets I reveal?” If you are truly fortunate, the Dark Powers and the Red Death will not take notice of your choice...

Joe Bardales
Kargatane
October 31, 1999

BOOK OF SECRETS: INTRODUCTION

October 31st, 753.

VALLAKI.



Ernst Turagdon withdrew the red-hot knitting needle from the birdcage, dropping it into a glass of water to sizzle. Eventually his uncomprehending eyes rose to meet the gaze of the two men standing in the doorway of his cramped room.

“Wha—,” he chirped, his unnatural voice cracking. Ernst cleared his throat and tried again.

“What exactly do you mean, ‘You killed the burgomeister’?”

“I take exception to that accusation,” shot back one of the standing pair, fending off the comment with an upraised finger. Holder Crosspen was a thin man, with prematurely gray hair. His eyes were hidden behind glasses with lenses tinted so darkly as to be opaque. “We did *not* kill the burgomeister.”

“Yes, quite right,” agreed his shirtless companion, Mynilar Sannom, idly scratching at his pierced navel. “We merely allowed him to die. That’s quite different, you know.”

Ernst sat back in his chair, lightly rubbing his left temple. Like his room, Ernst kept himself impeccably tidy. “But you *did* say he is now lying in four pieces on our carpet. What did he die from? Melancholy?”

Holder coughed. “He touched the Third Red Book in Aisle Five.” As this explanation was offered, Mynilar flicked a thumb across his own throat to illustrate.

“Mmm, yes, yes. And you both watched this happen?” The two men half-shrugged. Ernst stood up, took a few steps toward his visitors, and turned to face Holder. “Might I ask why you did nothing to prevent this?”

Holder fidgeted with his glasses. “I was in the back, reorganizing the cookbooks. By the time I saw him, his hand was already on the book’s spine. What was I supposed to do? Scream, ‘Don’t tug on that tome, it’s the trigger to a lethal deathtrap?’ Would have raised a few odd questions, don’t you think?”

Ernst stared dully at Holder’s face for a few seconds, then abruptly spun to address Mynilar. “You were supposed to be manning the front desk, were you not? That’s in full view of Aisle Five. What kept you quiet?”

Mynilar puffed out his pasty, tattooed chest. “If you must know, I was working on a new poem. When complete, anyone who hears the verse read aloud will be instantly stricken dead.”

Ernst raised an eyebrow. “Does this poem have a title?” he asked, honestly curious.

Mynilar grinned. “I call it, ‘Ode to the Moss-Encrusted Thing in a Bottle That I Believe to Have Once Been a Cat.’”

Ernst mused. “It’s a good start,” he concluded. “Well,” he sighed a moment later, “let’s go have a look at this disaster.” Mynilar stepped aside to let Ernst pass, but Holder snagged his sleeve, halting him.

“Hold on a moment,” Holder said, his voice betraying rising concern. With his free hand he pointed back at the birdcage on Ernst’s desk. “Pardon me for asking, but is that *my* pet budgie in that cage?”

Ernst glanced back at the tiny creature flailing about behind the bars. “Yes, I believe so.” He turned to leave again, but Holder tugged him back.

“What are you doing to my budgie?” Holder asked.

“I’m torturing it to death,” Ernst answered nonchalantly. “A better theoretical grasp of pain thresholds will greatly improve results in my future interrogations.” Ernst shrugged loose of Holder’s slack grip and slipped out into the hall. Mynilar followed with a conciliatory shrug of his own.

“But, but,” stammered Holder, his mouth agape. “Why experiment on *my* budgie?”

Ernst’s answer echoed back from the hall. “Because your pigeons only lasted an hour.”

Ernst followed the shadowy hallway out onto the creaking balcony overlooking the main room of the Vallaki Bookshop. Dust danced in the air, captured in cold sunbeams piercing the two-story room through a pair of tall windows in the western wall. Stuffed heads from a dozen species of local wildlife stared down from niches near the high ceiling, peeking out through the thick wooden beams supporting the oddly angled roof.

Ernst placed his hands on the heavy, baroque banister and peered down at the room below. The large chamber was divided into aisles by several rows of bookcases, each teeming with obscure tomes. More worm-eaten

BOOK OF SECRETS: INTRODUCTION

books were stacked around the edges of the chamber, almost obscuring several pale and ghastly portraits of pale and ghastly people.

Ernst sighed a bit as he looked down at Aisle Five in particular. “Oh, ye gods,” he murmured. “I can see the blood from here.”

Swallowing any further signs of annoyance, Ernst walked down the steps, followed by Holder and Mynilar. They stopped at the end of Aisle Five and stared dully at the crimson mess that dripped within.

“At least the trap caught him cleanly,” offered Holder as conciliation.

“Yes, right at the neck and knees,” aided Mynilar. “Very tidy.”

Ernst held his tongue as he approached the body. After examining the pieces of the burgomeister for a moment, his eye fell upon the Third Red Book, jutting out from the shelf. Extending a finger, he daintily pressed the book back into place. With a click, the two scything blades stretched across the aisle slid back into their concealed slots within the thick shelves.

Holder and Mynilar slipped up behind him. “Look,” suggested Mynilar, “We have nothing to worry about. Holder can just animate the corpse and send it on its merry way!”

Ernst gave the other two a suspicious look. “Really? Even with his head off?”

“Oh, yes, of course!” Holder blustered. “Here, sit him up and help me stick his bits back on.”

The three men pulled the headless corpse upright, leaning its back against the blood-spattered bookcase. While Ernst cautiously balanced the burgomeister’s head upon its severed neck, Holder and Mynilar knelt to align the corpse’s shins with its knees. Soon enough, the three men stepped back to examine their handiwork. After a minute, Ernst glanced impatiently at Holder.

“Oh, right,” Holder sputtered, crouching before the precariously balanced corpse. Holder removed his tinted glasses, revealing eerie, inhuman eyes. He thrust his hand just above the slain man’s face.

“Arise, dead one, I demand of thee! I call upon my dark gift! I grant thee the life that comes after death! Arise, and obey me!”

A chill passed through the witnesses. After a moment, the corpse’s glassy eyes blinked open. Mynilar and Holder sighed with relief. Holder stared into the zombie’s eyes, pointing at one of the dead man’s boots.

“Wiggle your toes, minion,” Holder ordered, his voice thick with menace. Still moving only its eyes, the zombie looked down at its feet. Soon enough, the indicated boot began to weakly flex.

“Voilà!” exclaimed Holder, jumping to his feet. “Mind you, he’s just a mindless undead puppet chained to my will, but we can work around that.”

“Mmm, yes, yes,” intoned Ernst, unconvinced. He knelt down at the dead man’s side. “You there,” he barked. “Burgomeister! Look me in the eye.”

The zombie twisted its neck to look at Ernst—and its neck kept on twisting, until the unanchored head lost its balance, tumbling free of its perch and rolling halfway down the aisle.

Mynilar covered his eyes. Holder sucked in his breath. Ernst shook his head. “This simply won’t do.”

“*What* izzn’t going to do?” asked a hissing voice from above. The three men scurried to the end of the aisle to greet the newcomer as he sauntered down the stairs from the balcony. The man was completely swallowed by a heavy black cloak, its cowl pulled up to conceal the wearer’s face. Only his unnaturally pale hands were visible; one held a feather duster.

“Where have *you* been, Jaerdaph?” asked Holder.

“Why?” The cloaked newcomer studied the faces of his three compatriots. “Whatever’zz gone wrong, it’zz nothing to do with me. I’ve been up in the attic all day, duzzting the cobwebzz out of Ryven’s room.”

Mynilar barked with laughter. “Oh, isn’t *that* nice! Did Ryven ask you to do that? Feeling chatty, was he?”

Jaerdaph’s pale lips twisted into a frown. “Azz a matter of fact, he wazz.” He thrust the feather duster at Mynilar angrily. “You know, you might want to conzzider that maybe it’zz that attitude of yourzz that keepzz Ryven from warming up to you.”

Mynilar grunted, crossing his arms. “Ryven wouldn’t ‘warm up’ if I burned him at the stake.”

“All right, that’s quite enough of that,” interrupted Ernst, stepping between the irate men. Ernst turned to the spidery figure still standing at the foot of the stairs.

“Well,” explained Ernst, “it appears that these two evil geniuses have killed the burgomeister in our shop.”

“That is *completely* unfair!” screamed Holder.

“Quite right,” consoled Ernst. “I do apologize. Jaerdaph, I should have said that these two chose to sit and watch as one of our deathtraps sliced the burgomeister into various cuts of meat.”

Jaerdaph shrugged, a scowl barely visible within the his cowl. “So what’zz the problem?” he hissed.

“The problem, my dear, is that it is currently . . .” Ernst craned his neck to look back at the hanging clock ticking near the door into the cellars. At that very moment the clock chimed, and a stuffed crow’s head extended from the clock’s face twice in rapid succession, cawing each time.

“. . . two o’clock,” Ernst concluded. “That means we have less than four hours before the sun sets. Do remember that this *is* Barovia. If our beloved burgomeister is not hale, hearty and *at home* before sunset, his wife will—quite rightfully—conclude that something horrible has happened to him.”

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Jaerdaph scowled a bit more. “I zztill don’t zzee the problem. Once it gettz dark, we can go over to the burgomeizzter’zz manor and kill hizz wife. I’ll do it myzzelf. Problem zzzolved.”

“Not quite,” echoed a voice from a large grate in the floor near the front doors, flanked by the front desk and the stuffed body of a rearing creature dubiously labeled as a bear. The four men turned to watch as a spindly arm pushed the grate open from below.

The creature that emerged from the crawlspace beneath the shop floor resembled a scarecrow, its withered flesh stretched tight across its bones.

“I would recommend against eliminating the burgomeister’s wife,” advised the creature. Its voice reverberated strangely. “She has two brothers, currently serving in the Barovian militia occupying Teufeldorf in the former Gundarak. Although the woman has been estranged from her siblings for years, her death would assuredly prompt in them a thirst for vengeance.”

“Good gracious,” sputtered Holder, staring at the creature’s bony frame. “William, when’s the last time you ate anything?”

“—So to speak,” added Ernst.

The withered creature’s hand unconsciously rose to touch the dagger nestled just under its arm. The hand bore a black ring with dull red runes, matching the dagger’s hilt. As hand touched dagger, the runes on both ring and hilt flashed bright crimson.

“I’ve been too busy to sustain myself. Need I remind you all that our annual report has to be completed by midnight tonight?”

Ernst raised an eyebrow. “Mmm, yes, yes. And how is the report coming?”

William glared back at Ernst. “It’s almost done. I’m still applying the gold leaf to a few illuminations.”

“Excuse me,” interrupted Mynilar, holding up his hand. “But exactly why are you putting gold leaf on a blasted espionage report? We’re spies, not monks! We aren’t being graded on penmanship here!”

“And for that matter,” interjected Jaerdaph, “why doezz it have to be done by midnight tonight?”

William glared hatefully at the two men. “It has to be done by midnight tonight, because *that* is when the messenger from Necropolis is due.”

“Yes, yes,” Mynilar spat back, “but the messenger never *comes*, does he? That precious report is going to sit on a shelf in the cellar, gathering dust next to *last* year’s report, and the report from the year before *that*. The messenger isn’t coming! He’ll never come! Don’t any of you get it? We’ve been abandoned in this backwater hell!”

William violently snatched his dagger from its hilt and drove its blade deeply into the floor. “And *that*,” William hissed, recovering his composure, “is why the annual report has to be so extravagant. So that when the

Kargat *do* examine our work, they will be so impressed that they will beg us to come home.”

“Excuse me!” Ernst waved for attention. “If I might bring this delightful patter back around to our current dilemma, we have a dead burgomeister—

“*Undead*, now,” mumbled Holder.

“Yes, my error. We have an *undead* burgomeister cooling in Aisle Five. And as you all have so aptly pointed out, we must solve this problem on our own.”

“I zztill don’t zzee the problem,” murmured Jaerdaph. “I zztill zzay we go kill the burgomeizzter’zz wife tonight. Zzo what if her brotherzz come zzznooping around? We can handle adventurerzz.”

Ernst frowned. “You know, this *is* the burgomeister of Vallaki we’re talking about, not some random do-gooder no one will ever miss. His death will be *noticed*, you understand? *Someone* must have seen him come in here. Even if we do kill his wife, this whole wretched village will still come screaming for our heads. Do you think we’re capable of defeating several hundred angry villagers brandishing torches and pitchforks?”

The others looked around at each other with emerging grins. Eventually William spoke up. “It would certainly be fun to try.”

Ernst’s frown deepened. “Mmm, yes, yes. But that’s not our real problem. Who *else* do you think might notice if a Barovian burgomeister gets chopped up, eh? Who *else* do you think might come snooping about? Hmm?”

The others’ grins melted. Holder grasped at the air. “You don’t mean . . .”

Now Ernst grinned. “That’s right, Count Strahd. This dead burgomeister will lead Strahd right to our doorstep. And if Strahd learns that a cell of Azalin’s spies is lurking in his domain, he will personally butcher us and sell the meat at three pence to the pound!”

All the blood drained from Mynilar’s face. “We need to get out of here, now.” He started pacing frantically, rambling to himself. “We can flee! We can scatter to the winds and never come back! If we leave right now, we could be in Borca by tomorrow night!”

“It’ll never work,” wailed Jaerdaph, slumping to the floor. “If we abandon our pozzt, then it’ll be the *Kargat* that butcherzz uzz.”

“Wait,” interrupted Holder. “If we get butchered, does that mean we don’t get to live forever?”

“*Yes!*” screamed the others in unison.

“So I’ll have lived in this Barovian cesspool with you scum all these years for *nothing*?”

“*YES!!*” screamed the chorus.

Holder gulped. “We have to do something!”

“Well,” William mused, “one disaster at a time.

Whether or not we get disemboweled tomorrow, we still need to have our annual report done tonight. If anyone needs me, I will be succumbing to madness in my work room. When Strahd arrives to turn us inside out, let me

BOOK OF SECRETS: INTRODUCTION

know.” With that William dropped his head back down into the crawlspace, pulling the heavy grate shut after him with a resounding clang.

Mynilar slumped against the end of a bookcase. “How long do you think William’s gone without feeding?” he asked the group.

“Ooh,” guessed Holder, “from the looks of him I’d say nearly a week. He must weigh under seventy pounds by now.”

“Damn podlingzz,” grumbled Jaerdaph. “You’re forgetting he hollowzz out from the inzzide too. I bet you hizz flesh izz no thicker than a pumpkin’zz. I’ll wager he doezzn’t weigh an ounce over thirty poundzz.”

Mynilar perked up. “I’ll take that! Say, five gold—”
“*Gentlemen!*” shouted Ernst. “Focus! We are mere hours away from our doom!”

Mynilar, Holder, and Jaerdaph dropped their heads. “Sorry, Ernst, quite right.”

Ernst paced around the foyer, his hands clasped around his back. “Our dilemma is quite clear: The burgomeister is lying dead on our floor.”

“—*Undead!*”

“Mmm, yes, yes. Right now, no one but us knows that he is dead. This is our little secret. So far, so good. However, in less than four hours his wife will notice his absence. Come the morning she will get help; some cretinous villager will say he saw the burgomeister come in here, and our little secret will be no more.”

“Zzo what are we zsupposed to do?” wailed Jaerdaph. “We can’t bring the man back to life!”

“And for some reason I’m still figuring out,” added Mynilar, “we can’t just do the sensible thing and run for our miserable lives.”

“Do you think his wife might notice if we just stitched his head and legs back on and sent him on his way?” asked Holder, his voice hopeful.

Ernst regarded him coldly. “He’s a mindless, shambling zombie. That would work wonderfully if we had to replace one of *you*, but at very least his wife will probably notice his rapid slide to room temperature . . .”

Ernst’s voice trailed off. The room fell into an expectant silence.

Suddenly, Ernst’s gaze snapped back into focus. “I think I have a plan.” The others leaned forward in desperation. “Mynilar, lock up the shop; we’re closing early. Holder, Jaerdaph, you two start searching the stacks for books that might help us. Drawden, you—”

Ernst stopped abruptly, as did everyone else. He spun on his heel, hastily scanning the room. “Where in the Nine Hells is Drawden?”

“I think he’zz in hizz room,” offered Jaerdaph. “I heard him in there earlier.”

Ernst rushed up the stairs, taking three steps at a time. “You all get to work; I’ll fetch Drawden. We’ll need him if my plan is to have any hope of success.”

Ernst ran across the balcony, into the shadowed hall, and past his own room. Just before the winding stairs up to the attic he reached Drawden’s room and kicked open the door.

Drawden was inside, a pudgy, leathery man in a black, disheveled robe. He was leaning heavily against the door of his closet, just barely keeping some hideous, shrieking *thing* within the closet from bursting free. While three mottled, scarred left arms pressed out from the doorway, clutching at his torn clothes and exposed flesh, Drawden was straining with one foot to reach an enchanted scroll lying just out of reach on the floor.

Ernst leaned into the room. “Drawden, could you come downstairs? We have a bit of an emergency.”

Drawden glared at Ernst, his face red from exertion. “I’m somewhat busy at the moment; what’s going on?”

“We have a secret, and we have four hours to find a way to keep it a secret forever.”

“What happens if I don’t help?”

“We all get peeled like onion skins.”

Drawden mumbled something under his breath. “Very well. I’ll be down just as soon as I’m done here.”

“Mmm, yes, yes.” Ernst withdrew from the room, politely closing the door as he went. Drawden went back to desperately reaching for the scroll with his toes.

A moment later there was a knock at the door. Drawden barked something unintelligible, and Ernst leaned back into the room.

Ernst raised an eyebrow. “Forgive me for prying, but isn’t that the Gibbering Thing you’ve got there?”

Drawden nodded, swatting away one of the blindly grasping, misshapen hands.

“Ah. Very well. Don’t let me bother you.” Ernst closed the door again.

A moment later it opened once more, and Ernst stuck his head in a third time.

“What’s it doing out of the cellar?”

Drawden’s voice strained from his exertion. “Misbehaving.”

Ernst’s gaze hopped idly from Drawden, to the Gibbering Thing pounding against the inside of the closet, to the scroll just beyond Drawden’s foot. “Well,” he chimed, finally, “as I said, we need you downstairs as soon as you wrap up here.” With that Ernst left, shutting the door behind him.

Drawden sighed to himself. “I suspect I should have just listened to my horoscope and stayed in bed.”



FORTUNE-TELLING FOR THE FAINT OF HEART

HOW TO LOOK PRESCIENT IN THREE EASY STEPS

by Andrew Hackard
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"The future arises out of what goes on in the present."

—Norman Spinrad

The party entered the gaily colored *vardo* in single file. Though it was a bright, sunny day outside, inside the gloom of night was kept at bay only by a few guttering candles. Behind a cracked ebony table sat the crone, grinning through full lips as she shuffled the worn deck of cards.

"So, you wish to know your fortunes?" cackled the *Vistana*. "Be certain, my young friends, for the future is rarely pretty and never exactly what one hopes to hear. Ignorance, as you *giorgios* say, is often bliss. Is this truly what you want?" She gazed deeply into the eyes of the four people standing before her. They returned her gaze just as deeply.

"Very well, then." With one final shuffle, she held the cards out to *Mieckel*. "Hold the cards for a moment, thinking of what you wish to know, then pass them to your left." The thief took the cards solemnly, pressed them between his hands, then got a mischievous grin and passed them to *Alfric*. His pointed ears twitched as he held the cards for the briefest instant before handing them to *Josif*. Unconsciously fingering his amulet, the young priest murmured a few words—a prayer, perhaps?—before passing the cards to his left. *Robyn* took them gravely in one hand, dropping her left hand to her sword hilt, then returned the cards to the aged woman across the table.

"Now, let's see what the *tarokka* and *Madame Rosalie* can discover for you, eh?" Another cackle, and the *Vistana* exposed the first card. "The two of stars: the *Diviner*. This portends . . . uh . . . oh, rats."

And thus ends a promising session of fortune-telling. Use of the *tarokka* cards and *diksha* dice can add flavor to a *RAVENLOFT* adventure, if the *Dungeon Master* is comfortable with their use. A *Vistani* encounter practically requires some form of fortune-telling, and if the *Dungeon Master* doesn't offer, the players are likely to ask. So it pays to be prepared.

The best way to be prepared, of course, is to know in advance what the outcome is going to be. Stacking the *tarokka* deck is one method, but it's difficult to pull off under the eyes of suspicious players. With *diksha*, you don't even have the option of predetermining the results. Thus, few *Dungeon Masters* attempt to use the *tarokka* as the tools they were meant to be, and very few use the *diksha* at all. This is a shame.

One of the slickest ways to use the fortune-telling techniques is actually to let the lay of the dice or the cards determine the course of the adventure. This was done in the original *Ravenloft* adventure, and for the *Dungeon Master* who can plan his game ahead to include this feature, it is an excellent way to ensure that the reading is accurate. It's also a lot of work.

Let's assume, however, that you haven't prepared for a fortune-telling session, and yet you've found yourself in one. Do not despair! This article will help you get through it without making a fool of yourself (unless that would help the story), and will even help you look like the gaming god you are, when everything you predict comes to pass. "Just as I predicted," cackles the *Dungeon Master* . . .

If you aren't fortunate enough to have the *tarokka* or *diksha*, instructions for using regular cards and dice to simulate them are found at the end of my article, "More Fun and Games," in *The Book of Sorrows*.

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A Note on This Article

To demonstrate the principles I'm going to illustrate, I actually did the card and dice layouts which are included here. The characters and situations were set before I began the readings, so I have done nothing to "cook" this article to make the results come out. What I got is what you see.

Scenario One: Feast of Goblins

"Harmonia, eh?" wisecracked Mieckal. "Doesn't look like the brochure they showed me back in Vallaki."

"Hush, Mieke," said Robyn. "Remember that we've come here for a festival. Try to look happy."

"Look, Vistani," whispered Josif. "Are they here for the festival as well?" His eyes darted behind them, expecting to see the caravan captain dogging their heels.

Alfric glanced over at the camp. "It's possible. The Vistani follow their own path, but they are known to be fond of music and dance. There will certainly be enough of both in the next few days to satisfy them."

Mieckal looked sour. "You'd think those booksellers could have mentioned that the Vistani would be here. They certainly seemed to know everything else about this festival."

"Worried about the competition, Mieke?" Robyn's gaze never left the roadside, but it was clear she was enjoying her companion's discomfort.

"Hush, someone's coming!" The bushy hairs at the top of Alfric's ears twitched. "Sounds like two. . . no, three youths. From the encampment."

"Should we take cover?" Josif's fingers stroked his amulet. "If they're Vistani, Ezra only knows what they want. . ."

"We do not hide from children, Josif, even Vistani children. You just trust to Ezra, and I'll trust my blade." Robyn patted her sword hilt, in a manner not entirely reassuring to the priest.

Mieckal looked toward the camp. "You know, it wouldn't hurt to scope them out before we go into the city."

Just then, the three girls burst onto the road from the trees to the right. Giggling madly, two of them raced across the road and on towards the wagons. The third, however, stopped directly in front of the party and looked at them for a full minute. Finally, she said, "Yes, you are the ones. My grandmother has been waiting for you. Come, follow me."

In this scenario, the Dungeon Master has decided to lead into *Feast of Goblins* by doing a card reading. This is also only the second adventure she has run for this party, so she has decided to use the reading to fill in some backstory for the player characters, with her players'

approval. Rather than pre-select cards for the reading, she has decided to let them fall where they may, trusting in the First Rule of Fortune-Telling:

Rule 1: You know more than the players do.

This is crucial, because many Dungeon Masters feel that they are operating from weakness when they aren't in firm control of events—and it's hard to be more out of control than when you rely on randomness to guide your players. In performing a reading, you must always remember that you know what's going to happen; the difficult part is fitting the reading to what you already know without giving away too much.

While the Dungeon Master in our example could take time to riffle through her books to look up the precise meanings of all the cards she draws, it would take time and interrupt the smooth flow of the reading. She has decided, therefore, to "wing it" and simply give general information and clues based on what she comes up with.

Since she has four characters in her group, she has decided to use the Pyramid pattern given in the *Forbidden Lore* boxed set, as its base of four cards gives an easy way to provide some past details for each player to use. It's also a convenient pattern to lay out and is visually appealing.

The first card she draws is the two of stars, **The Diviner**. This card is the focus for the whole layout, the pivot that the whole reading revolves around. Our Dungeon Master is perplexed for a moment—there's no diviner in *Feast of Goblins*!—but then decides it's a metaphor:

"Oh, my, my," says Madame Rosalie, rocking back and forth. "This card is the focus of what is to come. Someone is looking for magic—yes, forbidden magic. He must be stopped."

The second card is placed to the left of the first; it is a crown card, **The Broken One**. Our Dungeon Master continues her reading:

"You will be opposed in your quest by one who was human, but is no longer."

The third card goes to the right of the first two. The Dungeon Master turns it over and becomes even more puzzled; she has drawn the eight of stars, **the Necromancer**. After a brief thought, however (and a

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quick glance below at Rule 2), she realizes whom this must refer to:

“There is an evil wizard in your future, but he will aid you to keep this forbidden magic out of the hands of those who would destroy this land. He is your ally.”

The next four cards are the cards that the Dungeon Master will use to provide some extra character history for her four players. Thus, she speaks in generalities here (even more so than above), as she will fill in details later. The first card in this row of four is the seven of stars, **The Illusionist**, and the Dungeon Master decides it applies to Josif, a 4th-level anchorite.

“Young priest, you have been deceived before, but you are now on the true path. Keep your eyes open, and you will know the truth.”

The next card is the four of coins, the Merchant, and the Dungeon Master wastes no time in applying it to Mieckal, the 6th-level thief.

“You will someday regret giving up the family business for the adventurer’s life.”

Next, our Dungeon Master draws **The Invoker**, the six of stars (and inwardly shakes her head—aren’t there other suits in the deck?), which she decides applies to Alfric, the half-elven mage. Alfric failed a powers check in his very first adventure, and she works that into this reading:

“You are strong with the Art, but do not be further seduced by the power it offers.”

The final card, then must apply to Robyn, the 5th-level avenger. The Dungeon Master lays down **The Marionette**. Fortunately for her, our Dungeon Master had already been thinking about Robyn’s backstory, and this fits perfectly.

“Your past has been controlled by others. It is your job in the future to learn to control yourself.”

With that out of the way, the Dungeon Master returns to the task at hand: giving out clues to this adventure. The eighth card she draws represents an immediate future evil; it is the nine of coins, **The Miser**. While the Dungeon Master had decided earlier that the fees described in *Feast of Goblins* would be waived for the duration of the festival she has added for “local color,” she quickly decides that the guards at the Whirling Bridge will try to collect the fees anyway.

“Beware! Soon, you will be faced with one to whom money is dearer than air. Do not let him deceive you.”

The ninth card she draws is another crown card: **The Esper**. At this point, the Dungeon Master is about ready to give up this whole fortune-telling thing; there are no espers in *Feast!* On the spur of the moment, she decides to add a mad seer to the jail in Harmonia; if the party listen to his ravings, they may learn some information. (This is a bit of a cheat on her part, of course, but a good Dungeon Master must always be flexible.)

“You will soon meet one who can help you, if you let him. He knows things he has never seen with his eyes.”

(The Dungeon Master also remembers this wording, and jots herself a note to make this mad seer blind to boot. If the party misses it after this obvious a clue, she won’t have any pity on them.)

The peak of the pyramid represents the final outcome of the adventure. Our Dungeon Master draws the two of glyphs, **The Missionary**, and puts a bit of an ironic spin on it:

“This is good news! You will play a part in making a new land out of the old!”

Then she takes a deep sigh and has another slice of pizza. Mission accomplished.

Scenario Two: The Hunt

“Madame Rosalie, I must capture this beast! He has left two of my friends gravely injured and the third missing. He must be brought to justice.”

The old Vistana looked squarely into Robyn’s eyes. Then she said, “If you must capture this beast, you must not chase it unarmed.”

The avenger clutched her sword. “Unarmed, I am not.”

Rosalie chuckled. “Unarmed, you are, if you know not what you face. Come, child, let us consult the wisdom of the cards.”

Robyn’s player missed a game session, and therefore Robyn wasn’t around when Mieckal started a bar brawl at the Old Kartakan Inn. She arrived the next day to discover Alfric and Josif clinging to life, and Mieckal missing.

(Mieckal was defeated in combat with the only werewolf in the place, and has become infected; he is searching for the werewolf that infected him. Josif and Alfric were attacked by wolfweres, and it is one of those that Robyn is pursuing—however, Robyn thinks it is a werewolf.)

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The Dungeon Master has asked Mieckal's player to arrive late to the game session, to roleplay his combat and search for a cure; Josif and Alfric's players get the week off while their characters heal up. She's beginning with Robyn's player, and decides to use the extended cross pattern to help provide some clues. However, because Robyn is confused about the identity of her quarry, the Dungeon Master is going to employ the Second Rule of Fortune-Telling:

Rule 2: Remember Obi-Wan. Everything is true, considered from a certain point of view.

While the Dungeon Master is not actually going to lie to Robyn's player, she may well choose to provide information which will mislead her, but will turn out to be accurate, in a manner of speaking. Since Robyn is already misled, our Dungeon Master considers this a fair tactic.

The central card provides the focus; in this case, the Dungeon Master has selected the one of swords, **The Avenger**, as the obvious choice for Robyn.

"You are the avenger, bringing justice for the guilty and mercy for the innocent."

The second card is the three of swords, **The Soldier**, and represents the recent past. The Dungeon Master has no trouble fitting this one in.

"You have survived by fighting to protect others, but you must now follow a different path to save your friends."

Next comes a card which represents a slight hindrance; the Dungeon Master lays down the archetype of coins, **The Rogue**. She begins to think she might need to call Mieckal's player to arrive sooner, as this gives her an idea.

"The Rogue seems to stand in your way. He will not be difficult to circumvent, but do not believe that his goals coincide with yours."

The fourth card represents the near future. The Dungeon Master draws the nine of swords, **The Torturer**. Since the werewolf had already toyed with Josif and

Alfric in the previous game session, the Dungeon Master decides to pass that information along:

"This card represents the near future; perhaps the very prey you now seek? He is a cruel man, and he will not hesitate to cause you pain if he can."

Fifth comes a card which is a slight aid; the two of glyphs, **The Missionary**. Doing a little retroactive rewriting, the Dungeon Master decides to tell Robyn's player that Josif was awake enough to give her a sketchy description of the beast she is after.

"Trust the priest. His information will help you soon."

The sixth card is the remote past; our Dungeon Master decides to use this to supplement the card from the prior reading and add to Robyn's history. She draws the eight of stars, **The Necromancer**, and tells the player:

"Evil magic, death magic has shaped your past. Beware lest it shape your future."

The seventh card is a major hindrance, something that Robyn will have to overcome to succeed in her quest. For this card, the Dungeon Master draws **The Temptress**. She decides to tie it to the previous card, to strengthen the reading (and makes a mental note to add such an encounter to the adventure).

"You will have a chance to fight evil magic very soon, but do not be distracted; this is not your goal at this time. Fight the magic, and you will lose."

The eighth card provides a glimpse of the far future, and our Dungeon Master plans to use this to help build an adventure for down the road. Thus, she has no worries about drawing the five of coins, **The Guildsman**; she'll worry about filling it in later.

"I see a chance to work with a skilled artisan, perhaps a leader of his community. Look for this opportunity down the road, and be open to it when it arises."

Finally, the Dungeon Master lays a card that will be a major help to Robyn. It is **The Beast!** After a momentary surprise, the Dungeon Master knows who this must be:

"There is one out there who pursues the same goal as you, for different reasons. When you see the Beast, be wary, for he may be a friend for now but could well turn into an enemy for later."

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She then excuses herself to call Mieckal's player and tell him to hurry over; she has something for him to do . . .

Scenario Three: Awakening Evil

"The horses easily cover the distance between you and Harmonia, but it will be nearly dark when you arrive there. Do you want to stop for the night or ride through? If you ride through, you'll need new mounts, but if you stop, Josif's captors will gain ground."

"Wait, friends. Rather than blindly follow the trail, perhaps we should consult Madame Rosalie for guidance. She has been a great help so far, and I feel this may be a crucial moment. We certainly can use all the help we can get."

Whoops.

Josif's player had to go out of town on short notice, so the Dungeon Master decided that an innocent victim was necessary for the ritual to reawaken Daglan, and had Josif kidnapped out of his sickbed in Skald. Thus, the remaining player characters (including a recently-cured Mieckal) are pursuing his captors, not only to prevent a great evil but also to rescue their friend.

What she did not count on, however, was that the players would decide to visit Rosalie once again; in fact, she left the tarokka at home. She briefly considers just having Rosalie's caravan be gone. Unfortunately, she had established that the festival was two weeks long, and the Vistani would be unlikely to leave before it was over. Thinking quickly, she reaches into her dice bag and pulls out her set of dikesha. To avoid slowing down the session, she is going to do a "gestalt" reading, considering all five dice at once instead of one by one. She's also going to apply the Third Rule of Fortune-Telling:

Rule 3:

It does not pay a prophet to be too specific.

(William Gresham, quoted by Robert A. Heinlein in *Expanded Universe*)

By providing very general clues, she can guide the players without ruining the climax of the adventure. Also, if things do not work out as she has foreseen, a

general prediction is easier to manipulate than a specific one. Luckily she does have her *Forbidden Lore* boxed set with her, and she consults the dikesha chart on the back of "The Waking Dream" for the names of the various symbols. Everything else, she's going to make up as she goes.

Madame Rosalie looked as though she was expecting you, which of course she probably was. Ushering you quickly into her vardo, she shook five knucklebones out of a small cloth bag on her table. "The cards can show you nothing more, but perhaps the dikesha can. From far-off Har'Akir, they are, a wasteland of blazing sun."

The Vistana handed the dice to Robyn, saying, "Each of you must blow on the dice and press them to your heart. Think of your missing young friend; think of the evil you are trying to prevent; think of the future. Then pass the dice." In turn, each of the heroes took the dice and did as she bade them. Robyn's expression was intent, portending doom for those who would oppose her. Alfric merely looked bemused, but his ear hairs twitched as though even from inside the vardo, he could hear Josif's cries for help. Mieckal looked worried, though in truth his chief concern was for the past, not the future.

When the thief had returned the dice, Madame Rosalie herself held them, blew on them, and pressed them to her heart for several seconds. Then she threw them toward the ceiling, and said, "Let the dice show us what we must know!"

The symbols were odd; a red face, an orange blade, green lightning; yet Rosalie seemed unconcerned. "This bodes well for your friend. See, the face of the Innocent proves that he is yet unharmed and uncorrupted. The yellow waves prove that his current troubles will pass soon enough, and the Road in white promises a long journey together for you all. The Sword is meant for you, maiden, and the rest of you as well: There will be blood spilled before this quest is completed."

She paused to catch her breath, and Mieckal blurted out, "But what of the green lightning?"

Rosalie fixed Mieckal with a long, piercing gaze. Finally, she said, "The green die promises terror, young rogue, terror beyond anything you have imagined. You must confront this terror to prevail."

Then she turned to look at the rest of the group. "My friends, it is time for us to part. You have much riding ahead of you before you reach the place of trial. When you return this way, we will be gone. If the Mists will, perhaps we shall see each other farther down the road. Until then, be well." She rose, circled the table, and lightly kissed each of them on the forehead.

As they exited the vardo, Robyn pointed to their horses. "They look fresh, not lathered at all. As if they are ready to ride another day!"

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Alfric smiled. “The Vistani are mysterious, Robyn, but they certainly can care for their beasts of burden. Come, let us mount up and catch young Josif’s new friends.”

The three adventurers vaulted into their saddles and began to ride back to the road. At the edge, Mieckal turned around, his hand raised in a salute and words of thanks on his lips.

The encampment was gone.

Conclusion

Telling the future has been a part of the RAVENLOFT game since the very first adventure, yet many Dungeon Masters are still afraid to try it in their own games. The game is richer, for players and for the Dungeon Master, when such a vital element can be included in the game sessions. It is my hope that, by applying these three rules—and a healthy dose of the creativity that all gamers share—the only mystery that goes into telling the future is that which you choose to put into it.

✕

ANCHORS OF FAITH

The Church of Ezra Revealed

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INTRODUCTION

When *Domains of Dread* was published in 1997, it introduced an important new religion to the Demiplane of Dread, the Church of Ezra. Although enough details were provided for players to create their own anchorite characters, the specific tenets and background of the faith have always remained sketchy—until now.

HISTORY

Ever since the founding of the Church of Ezra, in the last century, attempts to discover the true identity of Ezra have been made by countless scholars, both among her faithful and among her detractors. Yet to this day the historical existence of the mortal Ezra remains a topic of controversy. Although many claims have been laid by members of many faiths, no one has ever proven which “land cloaked in Mists” the mortal Ezra called her home.

Despite all the decades of scholarly research, and several theories to the contrary, Ezra’s mortal life remains the stuff of legend, her life and homeland forever set in the boundless “before time” of creation myths.

However, the birth of the *Church* of Ezra can be established with pinpoint accuracy, beginning with a name as rich in history as it is in infamy: *Dilisnya*.

The First Epiphany

IN THE TIME BEFORE, IN A LAND CLOAKED IN MISTS, THERE WAS A WOMAN, AND SHE WAS EZRA.

EZRA WAS A HEALER OF THE SICK AND PROTECTOR OF THE WEAK. SUCH WAS HER LOT IN LIFE. SUCH WAS HER ROLE IN THE GRAND

SCHEME.

EZRA TOOK PRIDE IN THE ROLE FATE HAD GIVEN HER. HER DUTY WAS HER JOY.

FOR MANY YEARS EZRA HEALED THE LAME AND WATCHED OVER HER PEOPLE. BUT AS TIME WENT ON, EZRA BEGAN TO SEE THE HOLLOW.

FROM THE MISTS OF DEATH CAME HORRORS OF THE NIGHT. THEY WERE THE DRINKER OF BLOOD, AND THE STEALER OF BREATH, AND THE BEAST THAT RENDS. MANY WERE THEIR LEGIONS. MANY WERE THE ROLES PLAYED BY DARKNESS IN THE GRAND SCHEME.

EZRA KNEW THAT DEATH WOULD COME FOR HER, AS IT COMES TO ALL IN TIME. WHEN EZRA ENTERED THE GRAY LAND, THERE WOULD BE NO GUARDIAN TO FILL HER ROLE. THERE WOULD BE NO ONE TO STAND BETWEEN HER PEOPLE AND THE LEGIONS OF THE NIGHT.

EZRA SET FORTH ON A QUEST TO FIND A GUARDIAN FOR HER PEOPLE. SHE SOUGHT THE ONE PURE HEART WHO WOULD ASSUME HER ROLE.

The Books of Ezra
Book I. i.–vii.

A century ago, the Dilisnya clan had spread to half a dozen domains, still scattered to the ends of the Core by the their ancestral feud with the lord of Barovia. Financial and political savvy was nearly as telling a Dilisnya trait as the shape of their faces, or the color or their eyes, ensuring their success in almost every land they called their home.

Yakov Dilisnya was born in northern Mordent in the year 641, the first born son of Lev and Elena Dilisnya. Yakov was raised in the luxurious manor first built by his grandfather; gaining several siblings as the years passed. His mother passed away when he was ten. Within a few years, Lev remarried, and his new wife bore him bore him

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two more children, including Yakov's young half-sister Camille.

Meanwhile, Yakov did little to impress his father. Although the young man clearly had a keen mind, he exhibited the weak will that plagues all too many sons cursed with "old money."

This changed, remarkably so, in Yakov's 25th year. One May afternoon, when Yakov had been out riding, his horse returned to the stables without its rider. An search was launched immediately, and Yakov was soon found sprawled in a nearby stream, unconscious and appearing to have suffered from a seizure. He was carried back to his bed, where he lay raving with fever for five days.

When the fever broke, Dilisnya demanded a quill and parchment, furiously scribbling page after page of what would eventually be known as *The First Book of Ezra*.

Speaking with new clarity of purpose, borne either from epiphany or fever-wrought madness, Yakov announced that he had been touched by an entity called Ezra, Our Guardian in the Mists. Yakov claimed that Ezra had chosen him to spread her word, and he dedicated himself to her faith, having his scribbled notes transcribed into an illuminated text. He traveled from Mordentish village to village, claiming it was his duty, his "role in the Grand Scheme" to build a flock of faithful.

Yakov struggled for years to establish Ezra's church, but he met with little success; he was far from being the only madman roaming the Core claiming to be the chosen one of an imaginary god. Eccentricity was far from unknown in the Dilisnya bloodline, and most of his own family simply disregarded Yakov as a harmless lunatic.

Yet as the years passed Yakov began to demonstrate divine powers he claimed to have been granted by Ezra. He visited plague-marked houses, healing with a touch; he visited haunted tombs, and cast out spirits with a word. In time, he could even deflect the weapons of his foes with a prayer, calling this last gift the Shield of Ezra. He had become the first anchorite.

Despite these miracles, Yakov failed to convert the masses. Perhaps this was due to resistance from the Weathermays, who suspected an insidious Dilisnya trick. More likely, Ezra's message failed because Yakov spoke much of duties and debts to others, but little of true compassion or salvation.

By 684, Yakov had converted less than a dozen followers to his faith. Meanwhile, Camille Dilisnya grew to womanhood and took a husband.

The Home Faith

E

ZRA SOUGHT FOR THE ONE PURE HEART IN MANY LANDS, BUT EVER DID SHE SEEK IN VAIN.

IN TIME HER QUEST BROUGHT EZRA TO THE END OF ALL THINGS. BEHIND EZRA STRETCHED ALL THE LANDS OF THE WORLD.

BEFORE EZRA ROSE ONLY THE MISTS OF DEATH.

EZRA SPOKE TO THE MISTS. ASKED SHE, "THE WORLD IS YOURS. YOU SET ITS SHAPE. WHY DO YOU ALLOW ITS PEOPLE TO WANDER, LOST AND AFRAID?" BUT THE MISTS DID NOT ANSWER.

AGAIN EZRA SPOKE. "WHY HAVE YOU FILLED YOUR WORLD WITH THE LEGIONS OF THE NIGHT?" BUT THE MISTS WOULD NOT ANSWER.

A THIRD TIME DID EZRA SPEAK. "ALL THINGS HAVE THEIR ROLE IN THE GRAND SCHEME. THE LEGIONS OF THE NIGHT HAVE THEIR PLACE. BUT GUARDIANS AND GUIDES HAVE THEIR ROLES IN TURN." STILL THE MISTS OFFERED NO REPLY.

EZRA SPOKE ONCE MORE. "I HAVE SEARCHED ALL THE VASTNESS OF YOUR LANDS, BUT I HAVE FOUND NO GUARDIANS FOR MY PEOPLE. I HAVE FOUND NO GUIDES FOR THE LOST." AGAIN THE MISTS WERE SILENT.

FOR THE LAST TIME DID EZRA SPEAK. "YOU HAVE FAILED THE GRAND SCHEME. YOU HAVE CREATED A HOLLOW THAT MUST BE FILLED. IF YOU WILL NOT WATCH OVER YOUR PEOPLE, THEN MUST I."

UPON THE FIFTH ENTREATY DID THE MISTS OF DEATH REPLY. FROM THE MISTS CAME A VOICE, AND THE VOICE SPOKE, SAYING, "TURN BACK, MORTAL. YOU KNOW NOTHING OF THE GRAND SCHEME. YOU KNOW NOTHING OF THE MISTS. YOU HAVE REACHED THE END OF YOUR WORLD. CONTINUE AND YOU SHALL FIND ONLY YOUR DESTRUCTION, NOTHING MORE."

YET EZRA HELD FAST AGAINST THE MISTS, SAYING, "YOU CANNOT BID ME ENTER, YET I CANNOT TURN AWAY. I OFFER MYSELF TO YOU SO THAT YOU MAY KNOW THE SUFFERING OF MY PEOPLE. IF I MUST BE DESTROYED FOR THEM, THEN THAT IS WHAT MUST BE."

THE MISTS OF DEATH FELL SILENT. THEN THE VOICE SPOKE, ONCE MORE. "ENTER THE MISTS IF YOU MUST, MORTAL, BUT NOT AS YOU ARE. YOUR KIND HAS NO PLACE HERE. TO ENTER THE MISTS, YOU MUST BECOME AS ONE WITH THE MISTS. NEVER AGAIN SHALL YOU LEAVE THEM. WILL YOU FOREVER SACRIFICE YOURSELF TO WATCH OVER THESE FEW MORTALS?"

SPOKE EZRA, "SUCH IS MY ROLE IN THE GRAND SCHEME. SO MUST IT BE."

AND WITH THOSE WORDS DID EZRA BECOME OUR GUARDIAN IN THE MISTS.

The Books of Ezra Book I. viii.–xix.

In 684 the young Camille Grymig *nee* Dilisnya discovered that her husband of a mere three years had taken a lover. Camille had been taught the skills of the poisoner by her father, and her heart housed all the most ruthless and obsessive traits of her bloodline. When Camille slew her husband and his lover with a vile toxin of her own creation, the Mists opened to grant her the domain of Borca.

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Camille invited her scattered family to join her in her new lands. Many rushed to accept her offer, enjoying their heightened status. Now entering middle age, Yakov Dilisnya joined them, finally relinquishing his quest to establish the Ezra faith in his homeland. Although dismissed as a harmless eccentric by most of his relatives, Yakov still possessed the keen political mind common to those in his family. Yakov saw a vast opportunity in Borca, and few knew Camille's mind better than her eldest sibling.

Yakov managed to convince Camille to grant him land just outside Levkarest to build a temple to Ezra. He slyly hinted that Ezra could be a useful tool, an opiate of the masses Camille could wield to win and keep the Borcans' love. Yakov even talked the young darklord into helping fund the construction of his grandiose temple.

Ground was broken the very next year. Construction of the Great Cathedral would take six decades to complete, but the Church of Ezra had at last grown roots.

Laborers and artisans were summoned from all of Borca and beyond to design and raise the mighty temple. As the stones were laid, Yakov and his few followers ministered to the workers. Perhaps the impoverished workers were willing to listen to the anchorites for their coins. Perhaps the Borcans were less contented than the Mordentish, and thus more receptive to Ezra's austere message. Perhaps the dark powers decided it was time for the church to bloom. Whatever the reason, the laborers stopped to listen the message of Ezra, and this time, it spoke to their hearts.

The faith spread to the workers, then to their families, and then throughout Borca. In the act of building the Great Cathedral, Yakov Dilisnya had at long last built his Church of Ezra. When Camille Dilisnya wed Klaus Boritsi in 687, it was Yakov who officiated the ceremony.

By the time the anchorites started holding services within the stone skeleton of their cathedral in 695, the Church of Ezra was thriving within Borca and a force to be reckoned with. A smaller, secondary temple was established in Sturben, and the faith had even started to spread into neighboring Dorvinia.

Three years later, Lady Camille Boritsi would have a tantrum. It would change the faith forever.

The First Schism

SPOKE EZRA, "SUCH IS THE ROLE I HAVE CHOSEN IN THE GRAND SCHEME. SUCH IS WHAT I MUST I DO."
AND WITH THOSE WORDS DID EZRA BECOME OUR GUARDIAN IN THE MISTS.
FROM HER PLACE IN THE MISTS OF DEATH, EZRA LOOKED DOWN UPON THE MORTALS OF THE WORLD, AND SHE EXTENDED HER HAND TO FILL THE HOLLOW.

BUT THE MISTS WOULD NOT PART. AGAIN A VOICE CAME FROM THE MISTS, SAYING, "FOOLISH ONE, YOU STILL KNOW NOTHING OF THE GRAND SCHEME. THE HOLLOW BELONGS TO THE MISTS ALONE. IT IS THEIR CREATION. YOU SHALL NOT SPOIL WHAT THEY HAVE WROUGHT."

EZRA SPOKE, SAYING, "THE MISTS HAVE WROUGHT NOTHING BUT SORROW. IT IS MY ROLE TO SUCCOR THE SUFFERING OF MY PEOPLE. WHAT IS TO BECOME OF MY PLACE IN THE GRAND SCHEME IF THE MISTS CANNOT BID ME ACT? WHAT SHALL BECOME OF THE PURE OF HEART, IF THEY HAVE NO GUARDIAN IN THE MISTS?"

ANSWERED THE VOICE, "YOU MAY HAVE THOSE WHO CHOOSE TO HAVE YOU, AND THOSE ONLY. IF THEY BE PURE OF HEART, THEN SO SHALL IT BE."

EZRA SPOKE AGAIN, ASKING, "AND WHAT OF THE LEGIONS OF THE NIGHT? WHAT OF THE DRINKER OF BLOOD, AND THE STEALER OF BREATH, AND THE BEAST THAT RENDS? WHAT OF THE HORRORS WHO WOULD STEAL THE PURE OF HEART AND ADD THEM TO THEIR LEGIONS?"

THE VOICE REPLIED, "THE LEGIONS OF THE NIGHT BELONG TO THE MISTS, NOT TO YOU. SHOULD MORTALS JOIN THE LEGIONS OF THE NIGHT, THEN THAT IS THE ROLE THEY HAVE CHOSEN IN THE GRAND SCHEME. THEY WERE NEVER AMONG YOUR PURE OF HEART."

EZRA ACCEPTED THIS, SAYING, "SO SHALL IT BE. BUT IF THE LEGIONS OF THE NIGHT CAN BE BROUGHT OUT OF THE DARKNESS, THEN THAT IS THE ROLE THEY HAVE CHOSEN IN THE GRAND SCHEME, AND THEY SHALL STAND IN YOUR LEGIONS NO MORE."

THE MISTS OF DEATH WERE SILENT.

EZRA THEN GATHERED UP THE PURE OF HEART, NAMING THEM HER ANCHORITES. IT WOULD BE THEIR ROLE IN THE GRAND SCHEME TO GUIDE THE LEGIONS OF THE NIGHT BACK INTO THE LIGHT.

AS EZRA SHALL GIVE SUCCOR TO HER ANCHORITES, HER ANCHORITES SHALL GIVE SUCCOR TO THE FAITHFUL. THE FAITHFUL SHALL SPREAD EZRA'S LOVE TO ALL THE WORLD, PUSHING BACK THE DARKNESS. WHEN THE LEGIONS OF THE NIGHT STAND EMPTY, THE HOLLOW SHALL BE FILLED. SUCH IS THE GRAND SCHEME.

The Books of Ezra Book II. xx.–xxx.

Some historians blame Camille's rampage in the year 698 on her realization that the Church of Ezra, which she had sponsored as a tool to pacify the masses, now threatened to overshadow her power. However, surviving records indicate that Camille's rash tantrum was more likely fueled by her discovery of extensive infidelity within her immediate family.

Outraged, Camille Boritsi poisoned nearly every member of her branch of the family. Yakov Dilisnya did not escape her wrath. Although Camille left no hard evidence of her role in the murders, rumors of her guilt

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spread through the general public like wildfire. The Dilisnya name became almost unbearably despised by the throng of Ezra's faithful, and the threat of revolution was palpable. Camille realized her act had spontaneously transformed the politically neutral Church of Ezra into the open threat that she feared.

Camille attempted to restore her reputation by disassociating herself from the death of the church's founder. She offered to erect a memorial statue of Yakov on the steps of the still-unfinished Great Cathedral. There are some who say Camille's offer might have even betrayed a pang of regret.

The offer blunted the outrage of the Borcan populace just enough to avoid open rioting in the streets. Ironically, this same, simple statue would also tear a open a rift within the Church.

Publicly, Camille simply offered the memorial to the Church as a gesture of her mourning. Privately, she also promised sizable donations towards the cathedral's construction, but added a requirement: the anchorites were not to "stir the pot" of insurrection. She hinted that refusing her offer would be costly indeed.

The offer exposed a schism brewing among the clergy for years, dividing them into two camps. In secret debates, one faction argued that the survival of the Church—not to mention its clergy—depended on keeping the far-reaching Dilisnya clan happy. They insisted that accepting Camille's gift would ensure the survival of the faith. They supported this argument by accentuating that all things had their role in the Grand Scheme. Ezra had even assigned Camille Boritsi a role: that of a generous but demanding patron. If the anchorites defied Camille's attempt to fulfill this role, there were many other roles Camille could surely take. "Nemesis" came to mind. The church had to accept the boundaries they lived under, not just to survive, but to obey Ezra's Grand Scheme.

The opposing faction resolutely rejected Camille's bribe. They renounced the opposition, pointing out that they worshipped *Ezra*, not Yakov Dilisnya. The suggestion that they should raise a monument to Praesidius Dilisnya before Ezra's own cathedral was even complete fell little short of blasphemy. This faction argued that it was the anchorites' duty to defend the *faithful*, not the powerful. The anchorites of this faction accused Ezra's clergy of becoming far too entangled in materialistic concerns. They were narrowly obeying the rules of Ezra's Grand Scheme, but neglecting her roles of healer and protector.

In the end, the faction opposed to the statue were badly outnumbered. The Church of Ezra accepted Camille's gift with a show of gratitude. Behind closed doors, the clerical schism grew uglier with each passing day. The minority faction found itself opposed from all sides. The faction's accusations of worldly corruption still hung in the air, and rumors hinted that Camille had

learned of the opposition to her gift. It was in her nature to lash out at her foes, so now every goblet of wine was seen as a potential murder weapon.

The minority faction was led by Felix Wachter, the Sentire of Sturben, himself distantly related to the Dilisnyas. Fuming at his peers and fearing for the lives of his allies, Wachter made the monumental decision to break away from the Home Faith and lead his supporters out of danger. By the winter of 698, Wachter and his four loyal anchorites had left Borca to establish a new temple in Mordent, which they claimed to be the first, true home of Ezra.

Preaching a revised, more openly compassionate version of Ezra's teachings, Wachter's sect discovered the acceptance that had eluded Yakov. In 699, Sentire Wachter claimed to have a series of visions in which Ezra presented him with her new teachings. Wachter scribed Ezra's revised tenets into scripture he called *The Second Book of Ezra*.

The rival sects remained antagonistic for years. Mordentish anchorites accused the Home Faith of corruption; Borcans labeled Wachter's sect as heretics, noting that even the miracles granted to the Mordentish anchorites had changed. Even their Shield of Ezra now manifested in a new way.

But as time went on, both sects gradually arrived at an admission. Ezra had seen fit to continue granting her blessings to *both* factions. Though the sects continued to disagree on many points, the realization led to reconciliation, which led to a new tenet of Ezra's faith: Only Ezra could say who did or did not exemplify her teachings. In granting the Mordentish sect a new manifestation of her Shield, Ezra had revealed a mysterious new facet of her Grand Scheme.

Within a decade, the schism would be healed. Then the Mists would withdraw to reveal a new domain, and the Church would be changed again.

The Gift from the Mists

IN THE TIME BEFORE, THERE WAS A GODDESS, AND SHE WAS EZRA. EZRA LOOKED DOWN UPON THE WORLD OF MORTALS, AND SHE SAW THAT THE WORLD WAS WELL-TENDED BY THE GODS.

BUT THEN EZRA'S EYES FELL UPON THE HOLLOW. SHE LOOKED DEEP INTO THE HOLLOW, AND SAW A PLACE ABANDONED BY THE GODS, ITS PEOPLE LEFT TO SUFFER ALONE.

EZRA ASKED HER DIVINE BRETHREN, "WHY HAS THIS PLACE BEEN FORGOTTEN? WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ITS PEOPLE?" BUT THE GODS DID NOT ANSWER.

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AGAIN EZRA SPOKE, SAYING, “WE ARE THE GUIDES AND GUARDIANS OF MORTALS. SUCH IS OUR ROLE IN THE GRAND SCHEME. IT IS NOT RIGHT THAT THESE MORTALS BE ABANDONED SO.” AGAIN THE GODS GAVE NO REPLY.

EZRA SPOKE FOR A THIRD TIME. “IT IS NOT RIGHT THAT THESE MORTALS BE LEFT TO SUFFER. IF YOU WILL NOT WATCH OVER YOUR PEOPLE, THEN MUST I.”

THUS EZRA LEFT THE REALM OF THE GODS. HER DIVINE BRETHERN WATCHED HER LEAVE IN SILENCE.

EZRA DESCENDED TO THE HOLLOW, BUT BEFORE SHE COULD ENTER, THE MISTS OF DEATH ROSE UP TO BLOCK HER PATH.

FROM THE MISTS CAME A VOICE, AND THE VOICE SPOKE, SAYING, “TURN BACK, GODDESS. THIS PLACE IS NOT FOR YOU. THIS PLACE IS FOR THE MISTS ALONE.”

YET EZRA HELD FAST, SAYING, “I CANNOT ALLOW YOUR PEOPLE TO SUFFER ALONE. IT IS MY PLACE TO PROTECT THEM.”

AGAIN THE VOICE SPOKE, WARNING, “TAKE HEED, GODDESS. YOUR KIND HAVE NO PLACE IN THE HOLLOW. ENTER AND YOU SHALL FIND ONLY YOUR DESTRUCTION, NOTHING MORE.”

YET EZRA STOOD FIRM AGAINST THE MISTS, SAYING, “YOU CANNOT BID ME ENTER, YET I CANNOT TURN AWAY. I CANNOT ALLOW YOUR PEOPLE TO SUFFER ALONE. IF I MUST BE DESTROYED, THEN THAT IS WHAT MUST BE.”

UPON HER FIFTH ENTREATY THE VOICE SPOKE ONCE MORE. “ENTER THE MISTS IF YOU MUST, GODDESS, BUT NOT AS YOU ARE. TO ENTER THE MISTS, YOU MUST BECOME AS ONE WITH THE MISTS. YOU MUST CEASE TO BE, YOUR NAME FORGOTTEN IN ALL OTHER PLACES. YOU SHALL NEVER RETURN TO YOUR BRETHERN. WILL YOU SACRIFICE ALL THIS FOR THESE FEW MORTALS?”

SPOKE EZRA, “SUCH IS MY ROLE IN THE GRAND SCHEME. SO MUST IT BE.”

AND WITH THOSE WORDS EZRA JOINED THE MISTS. HER NAME BECAME KNOWN TO THOSE IN THE HOLLOW, AND LOST TO ALL OTHERS.

The Books of Ezra Book III. i.–xiv.

The schism between the Home Faith and the Mordentish sect was resolved within a decade. The unfinished walls of the Great Cathedral rose above Levkarest. The Mordentshire sect established a chapel, and satellite temples were spreading to neighboring domains. The Core too had grown in the decades since the First Epiphany, and in 707 the Mists revealed the new domain of Dementlieu.

This event held no special import for the Church of Ezra, so it was nearly a year before a wandering anchorite, Joan Secousse, visited the new land—and rushed back to Mordent to report her startling news. At the very heart of the city of Port-a-Lucine an ancient cathedral was crumbling into ruin. When asked, the people of the city said the cathedral had been dedicated to

a goddess they knew only as Ste. Mere des Larmes, the “Sainted Mother of Tears.” But they were quick to add that the religion had died out nearly 400 years ago, and the cathedral had lain vacant in all the years since.

Secousse explored the cathedral, pondering if it could be used by the Church. Above the cracked altar, she discovered a stained glass window, still miraculously intact after centuries of neglect. Ste. Mere des Larmes was still visible in the glass. The image was unmistakably that of Ezra.

A number of anchorites were immediately dispatched from both sects to study the startling image in more detail. Led by Warden Secousse, the priests examined every inch of the crumbling ruins. They soon discovered the entrances to a maze of secret passages and chambers hidden within the cathedral’s foundations. At the heart of this secret sub-level, they found a sealed scriptorium where the secrets of Ste. Mere des Larmes had been preserved for half a millennium. Each scroll the anchorites read redoubled their awe.

The expedition returned to Levkarest in 709, declaring that they had uncovered the lost teachings of Ezra. Furthermore, they claimed Yakov Dilisnya had merely discovered a copy of these lost texts, distorting them to suit his own purposes. When the church elders protested, Joan presented them with her interpretation of the holy writ of the Mother of Tears, offering her new scriptures as *The Third Book of Ezra*.

The Church had established a Rite of Revelation in the wake of the First Schism to determine when a new aspect of the Grand Scheme had truly been revealed. In accordance with those rituals, Joan and her followers demonstrated that they had been blessed with a new manifestation of the Shield of Ezra.

The elders of the Church were amazed; Ezra had indeed again spoken. Joan was granted the title of Bastion, and returned with her followers to Port-a-Lucine to continue their esoteric studies of the “lost history” of Ezra.

The Fall of Night

SUCH IS MY ROLE IN THE GRAND SCHEME,” SPOKE EZRA. “SO MUST IT BE.”

S

WITH THOSE WORDS DID EZRA SACRIFICE HER MORTAL LIFE TO BECOME OUR GUARDIAN IN THE MISTS.

FROM HER PLACE IN THE MISTS OF DEATH, EZRA LOOKED DOWN UPON THE MORTALS SHE HAD FORSAKEN ALL ELSE TO PROTECT.

ONLY THEN DID SHE SEE THE WICKEDNESS IN THE MORTALS’ HEARTS. ONLY THEN DID SHE THAT THE MORTALS SHE SOUGHT TO PROTECT AND THE LEGIONS OF THE NIGHT WERE ONE AND THE SAME. ONLY THEN COULD SHE SEE THE FOULNESS OF THEIR HIDDEN SINS.

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EZRA SAW THAT THOSE WHO HAD BEEN TRUE TO HER WERE BUT FEW. A SCATTERING OF DIM STARS IN A SKY OF DEEPEST BLACK. IN HER NEW ROLE, EZRA SAW THAT THE SINFULNESS OF THE MORTALS WAS SO LOATHSOME THAT THE MISTS OF DEATH WOULD SOON WIPE THE HOLLOW CLEAN OF THEIR BLACKENED SOULS.

EZRA'S HEART SANK, BUT SHE WOULD NOT ABANDON HOPE. SHE KNEW THAT SHE COULD NOT SAVE THE SOULS OF THE WICKED, BUT SHE COULD OFFER SALVATION TO THOSE WHO REPENTED THEIR EVIL WAYS AND ALLOWED HER GUIDANCE INTO THEIR HEARTS.

EZRA DID GATHER HER FAITHFUL FEW, NAMING THEM HER ANCHORITES. IT WOULD BE THEIR ROLE IN THE GRAND SCHEME TO GUIDE THE CORRUPTED BACK INTO THE LIGHT.

AS EZRA WOULD GUIDE AND PROTECT HER ANCHORITES, HER ANCHORITES WOULD STAND VIGIL OVER THOSE OF GOOD FAITH.

EZRA'S SERVANTS MUST SHOW THE CORRUPTED THEIR PATHS OF DOOM, AND MUST GUARD THE FAITH FROM THOSE LOST SOULS WHO WOULD NOT BE SAVED. HER ANCHORITES MUST REDEEM THE FALLEN AND DESTROY THE LEGIONS OF THE NIGHT WHO WOULD CORRUPT THE PURE.

WHEN THE MISTS OF DEATH SWEEP DOWN, WHEN THE DARKNESS DEVOURS THE LAND AND CONSUMES THE WICKED, EZRA SHALL STAND VIGIL OVER THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN TRUE TO HER.

THE TIME OF ULTIMATE DARKNESS IS FAST FALLING UPON THE LAND. WE LIVE IN THE DAYS OF DYING LIGHT. SIGNS AND PORTENTS SURROUND US, AND ONLY THOSE WHO ADMIT EZRA'S LIGHT SHALL BE SPARED.

The Books of Ezra Book IV. xix–xxix.

For the next thirty years, the three sects of the Church of Ezra continued to strengthen and grow, suffering no major setbacks. Wandering anchorites continued to spread the word of Ezra. For every anchorite that vanished in the night, another would convert new faithful in new villages.

When the Grand Conjunction struck the Demiplane of Dread in 740, the Great Cathedral in Levkarest was nearing completion. Many of the faithful considered it little short of miraculous that the massive structure survived the tremors with only minor damage.

Some of Ezra's clergy were even more shaken than their temple, however. Some believed that the Grand Conjunction—commonly known as the Great Upheaval—was a sign that the Legions of the Night were dangerously gaining in strength.

For one such anchorite, Teodorus Raines, the effects of the Great Upheaval were profound. Raines was a native of Darkon, but had come to Borca to study Ezra's teachings under the Home Faith. Even while a young acolytes, Raines' peers noticed his tense and suspicious

demeanor. Some of his teachers had even gone so far as to advise Warden Raines not to present Ezra's teachings in such bleak terms; perhaps affected by the legends of his homeland, Raines spoke of the Legions of the Night as if they were eternally clawing at the very doors of the Great Cathedral. However, Raines maintained strict adherence to the letter of Ezra's scriptures, and in time was even granted her Shield. All signs indicated that he did indeed have Ezra's blessing.

Warden Raines believed that the Great Upheaval had been nothing less than an attempt by the Mists of Death to expel Ezra from their ranks, the first omen of a coming age when the Legions of the Night would scour the world clean. Although the Church elders did not see the world in Raines' apocalyptic terms, Praesidius Raskolka summoned a Bastion's Council to determine the Church's future. With Bastions Denisovich of Mordentshire and Secousse of Port-a-Lucine acting as his advisors, Praesidius Raskolka declared that Ezra's anchorites had a urgent duty to spread the word of Ezra to the four corners of the Core, even to those lands where existing religions stood in opposition to Ezra's word. Even more than had been the case before, young anchorites were encouraged to travel the Land of Mists, doing worthy works in Ezra's name and establishing new temples.

Warden Raines became part of this new wave of evangelical anchorites. He returned to his native land of Darkon, and began to preach Ezra's teachings to any who would listen. He faced massive opposition. Darkon's spiritual heart was in the grip of two state-sponsored religions: the Cult of the Overseer, openly embraced in Martira Bay, and the Eternal Order, somewhat begrudgingly worshipped throughout the rest of the domain. One more than one occasion Raines was physically threatened by the priests of the Eternal Order, but he persevered.

In fact, Raines may have survived simply because his influence was negligible. By the time the Great Cathedral was completed in 745, Raines had already traveled through half of Darkon, never finding a receptive audience to his fire-and-brimstone sermons. Meanwhile, visiting anchorites sent back word to the Home Faith that Raines had altered his proselytizing style since leaving Borca; he now claimed that Ezra herself was granting him prophetic visions.

Raines now spoke of a coming apocalypse he called the Time of Unparalleled Darkness. He claimed the ranks of the Legions of the Night would swell until they overran the land. The Mists of Death, sickened by their creations, would then destroy the world, wiping the slate clean. Ezra would spare all she could from this final doom, but her pact with the Mists of Death would only allow her to save those who had accepted her message into their hearts.

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Two additional factors made Raines' end-times sermons all the more disturbing: First, he was quite clear that if you were not one of Ezra's pious followers, you stood among the Legions of the Night. Second, he claimed the Time of Unparalleled Darkness would arrive within a single generation.

The Home Faith was distressed by Raines' extreme interpretation of the scriptures. However, he continued to receive the Shield of Ezra, the only sure sign that an anchorite was indeed serving Ezra in the Grand Scheme. Thus the Home Faith allowed him to continue his proselytizing, though they lent him very little support.

By 750, Raines was literally at the end of his map. All of Darkon stretched behind him, and he had not established a single new temple in an entire decade. His failures merely made him all the more determined to spread Ezra's word before it was too late. By the end of the year, Raines had settled in Nevuchar Springs, and could count his converts on one hand. When most Darkonians listened to Raines prophesy a time when the unholy forces of evil would rise up to destroy the world, they heard only the paranoid ranting of a madman.

Then the city of Il Aluk was destroyed in the Requiem, and a pall fell over the whole of the newly-dubbed Necropolis. Suddenly Raines' horrific prophecies seemed all too real, and he found his receptive audience at last.

Raines established a new temple of Ezra in Nevuchar Springs, expelling the Eternal Order from his city. Early in 751, Raines returned briefly to Levkarest, accompanied by half a dozen of his followers. He presented his nightmarish visions as the Fourth Book of Ezra, and revealed that he and the anchorites he had trained had been granted a new Shield of Ezra, protecting them from the insidious corruption of the Legions of the Night. The Rite of Revelation was fulfilled, and Raines returned to Nevuchar Springs, Bastion of the fourth sect of Ezra.

TENETS

What is Ezra? Was she a mortal heroine who ascended into the Mists? Was she a goddess who forsook the rest of the multiverse to protect the denizens of the Dread Domains? Or is she merely another false face of the ever-scheming dark powers? Ask four anchorites and one is likely to receive four different answers—especially if those anchorites belong to the four distinct sects of her faith.

However, move past this apparent confusion and one will discover that all anchorites, regardless of their credos, agree on what Ezra is *now*: Our Guardian in the Mists. The Church of Ezra is henotheistic overall; although her followers do not deny the existence of other gods such as Hala, Nerull, Bane, or Zhakata, they believe

that of all these entities, Ezra is the only being truly guarding over the denizens of the Lands of Mist, and thus the only being truly worthy of worship.

The four sects interpret this basic belief in different ways; while the esoteric Port-a-Lucine sect claims that these other gods are merely different aspects of Ezra herself, the anchorites of Nevuchar Springs often depict the gods of other faiths as demonic beings spitefully luring mortal souls away from Ezra's salvation. Both the Home Faith in Levkarest and the Mordentish sect generally acknowledge that other religions worship separate, less worthy gods, although many Mordentish anchorites believe a special connection exists between the Church of Ezra and the Church of Hala (to be revealed in *Van Richten's Monster Hunter's Compendium Volume III*, slated for release in the year 2000)

This pattern of agreement on basic tenets, but disagreement—occasionally leading to true opposition—over the exact interpretation of those tenets is endemic to Ezra's faith. Nowhere is this more true than in the Church's scriptures, *The Books of Ezra*.

The Books of Ezra

The holy writ of the Church of Ezra consists of four separate sections, each written by the founder of one of the four existing sects. Although these chapters carry simple numerical titles (*The First Book of Ezra*, *Book III*, etc.), some Church scholars have rarely referred to them by their authors; thus, *The Books of Dilisnya*, *Wachter*, *Secousse*, and *Raines*, respectively.

Each of the four Books begins with the author's version of Ezra's "creation myth," and then proceeds to relate Her message for the world. The four chapters frequently disagree with each other both in terms of philosophy and simple facts; for example, Book I claims Ezra was originally a mortal, while Book III claims she was a goddess. Book II explains that Ezra seeks to redeem the so-called "Legions of the Night," while Book IV insists She is actively trying to destroy the Legions of the Night before the existence of those accursed creatures drags the world to its final destruction.

Some critics of the faith have observed these blatant internal contradictions and ridicule the *Books of Ezra* as nonsense. However, these critics fail to understand that none of the scriptures are intended to be a literal description of historical events. Rather, each Book represents the author's attempt to relate their own, personal epiphany, distilling their rapturous experiences into a form that can be expressed with ink and parchment. Apparent contradictions, claim the anchorites, merely demonstrate that Ezra's Grand Scheme for the world is too complex for any one mortal to comprehend. Thus, She has chosen to reveal one aspect of her divine plan at a time; She leaves the task it to her faithful to study *The*

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Books of Ezra as a whole and reach their own interpretations. Naturally, when contradictions *do* arise, the faithful tend to favor the teachings introduced by their own sect.

The Grand Scheme

The Church of Ezra holds a strong belief in fate and predestination. They believe that all of existence follows what they call the Grand Scheme, and hold that all things have their place in that design. Although Ezra guides the Grand Scheme, even she has a specific role within it, and is bound by her position.

Predictably, the different sects vary in their interpretations of the Grand Scheme. The philosophy of the Home Faith (favoring the lawful neutral alignment) insists that all beings are assigned a specific part to play in the Grand Scheme, a role which cannot be altered. Those who choose to become Ezra's anchorites were fated to do so before their birth; the Legions of the Night are to be fought, but never hated, for they too are merely playing from a divine script. In fact, the Home Faith comes very close to depicting Ezra herself as a healer and protector out of duty, not devotion.

The Mordentish sect (favoring the lawful good alignment) agrees that all creatures have a specific role in the Grand Scheme, but claim that Ezra has granted all beings the right to *choose* the role they play. Mordentish anchorites preach that even the Legions of the Night have the innate capability to enter the light of Ezra's grace through personal redemption. Of course, if the Legions refuse this chance at salvation, they must still be repelled to protect the faithful.

Of all the sects, the Nevuchar Springs sect (favoring the lawful evil alignment) may place the most emphasis on the Grand Scheme. Their doctrines are filled with the chilling prophecy of the Time of Unparalleled Darkness, their fast-approaching Fall of Night. They hold that this apocalypse is inevitable, and that the blessed and the damned have already been chosen by Fate. The trick, of course, is discerning which is which. If the blessed are never awakened to Ezra's blessing, they will be destroyed with the rest of the world. If the damned are mistakenly brought into Ezra's fold, their very nature will compel them to drag the faithful down with them.

The Port-a-Lucine sect is the most unusual of all. The mysterious, contrary, esoteric texts they discovered hidden within the Ste. Mere des Larmes cathedral have lead them to all but reject the Grand Scheme. (Accordingly, they have lost the lawful aspect of their alignment, and are now true neutral.) While the Port-a-Lucine anchorites still believe that the Grand Scheme exists, they do not believe that the exact nature of that cosmic plan has even been reliably revealed. Some of their number even hold that the Grand Scheme is so

complex that it cannot be understood by mere mortals, their doctrines almost bordering on agnosticism. Thus, the priests of Port-a-Lucine have dedicated themselves to the study of Ezra in all her aspects. Through means both scholarly and mystical, they seek to rebuild their understanding of Our Guardian in the Mists from the ground up.

Ezra the Guardian

Despite their arguments over the exact nature of the Grand Scheme, all anchorites agree on Ezra's role in that plan: She is a healer and a guardian, humanity's lone compassionate protector. Unfortunately, the Mists of Death sharply limit her influence. Unlike the gods of other AD&D settings, Ezra has never manifested an avatar, nor does she ever grant miracles to any poor soul in need; the gift of Ezra's magic flows into her anchorites exclusively. It is then her anchorites' most solemn duty to extend these blessings to the rest of the world, watching over the faithful as Ezra watches over them. Anchorites are sworn to use their gifts to heal the sick, protect the weak, and in general improve the lives of the faithful. (More information on the duties of the clergy can be found in *Domains of Dread*.)

Part of the anchorite's role as Ezra's proxy requires that he or she actively oppose the Legions of the Night, the Church's name for forces of evil, regardless of their form. At the same time the Church must add souls to the ranks of Ezra's congregation; it is commonly accepted that Ezra can only "save" the faithful. Exactly what this "salvation" entails differs slightly from sect to sect, although all anchorites agree that it refers to both physical protection in this life and spiritual protection after death.

Ever since its founding, the Home Faith has been forced to walk a treacherous political tightrope, avoiding the machinations of Borca's elite. The Levkarest sect focuses on keeping the faithful and the fallen clearly separated; the Church feels no particular need to aid those who reject Ezra's word, whether they have refused Ezra's teachings or been lax in their faith. Meanwhile the Legions of the Night are merely to be kept at bay, manipulated into turning against their own kind.

Mordentish anchorites embrace a more inclusive doctrine, never ceasing in their attempts to lead new souls into Ezra's light. Those who have not yet found Ezra are to be actively sought and brought into the faith; the Legions of the Night are to at least be given the chance to shed their evil ways and find salvation. If the Legions will not redeem themselves, only then must they be eliminated as a threat to the minds and bodies of the faithful. Accordingly the Mordentish sect is the most active in its proselytizing campaign to win new souls. However, the success of this campaign has been offset by an unfortunate trend: Many wandering Mordentish

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anchorites and rural temples have simply disappeared, wiped out by the Legions they sought to oppose.

The Port-a-Lucine sect, still searching for the true message of Ezra, has been uncomfortable with the role of spreading Her word to the faithful. Although they will admit any member of Ezra's flock who seeks them out, they have done little to win new souls, feeling it irresponsible to preach what they cannot entirely sanction. Furthermore, the Port-a-Lucine anchorites lean towards the belief that Ezra's salvation is a largely spiritual affair; they hold that Ezra holds little interest in the material world, but stands at the end of every creature's life, waiting to lead the souls of the faithful through the Mists of Death and to their final reward.

The Nevuchar Springs sect, of course, is the most fervent in the separation of the faithful and the Legions of the Night. Their doomsday credo only allows them to see the world in black and white; one is faithful to Ezra, or one is an enemy of the faith. The Legions of the Night must be eliminated by any means possible.

Divination

Ezra's believers tend to place great credence in omens, prophetic dreams, and visions; after all, the history of their faith rests on the shoulders of a series of spiritual visionaries. Many anchorites extend this awe and respect for divinatory magic to Vistani fortunetelling and the art of astrology. Although never specifically referenced in any of *The Books of Ezra*, some anchorites have also claimed to find mathematical codes hidden within the text. Of course, any faithful follower of Ezra knows of the significant frequency of the number five within the scripture; this has led Ezra's faithful to consider five a lucky number, and led the early Church to declare that every fifth day would be a day of worship.

However, some anchorites have taken this fascination with divination and mathematics much deeper, using *The Books of Ezra* as their basis to delve into the arcane study of numerology. While the Port-a-Lucine sect approves of these studies, most established anchorites in the other sects warn against delving too deeply into the realm of superstition.

The Rite of Revelation

The contrary nature of Ezra's and the tradition of Church leaders discovering the message of Ezra through personal epiphanies has led to the rise of many wildly varying versions of Ezra's scripture. A fine line exists between a goddess speaking through her prophet and a madman spouting delusions; the Church's leaders are even more cognizant of this fact than the Church's critics.

After the First Schism, the Church devised a ceremony to separate the visionaries from the madmen.

If an individual anchorite seeks to establish a new sect, they must successfully perform three steps:

First, the supplicant must codify their personal relationship to Ezra, and the new aspect of the Grand Scheme She has revealed, in a holy writ penned by their own hand.

Second, the supplicant must demonstrate that Ezra has granted him or her a new manifestation of the Shield of Ezra, the surest sign of her blessing. If the supplicant cannot manifest the Shield, their petition is rejected as lacking the endorsement of Ezra. If the supplicant manifests the same Shield as one of the existing faiths, the Church will rule that the supplicant's visions have not revealed a sufficiently distinct aspect of the Grand Scheme to warrant establishing a new sect. If the supplicant *does* manifest a new Shield, the Church will warily recognize that the anchorite does indeed serve Ezra's plans.

Lastly, the supplicant must present five acolytes, new anchorites who have been trained under the supplicant's teachings and now manifest the same new Shield. This final step offers irrefutable proof that Ezra wishes the Church to spread this new aspect of her teachings.

If all three steps are successfully completed, the supplicant is granted the title of Bastion (see below), and holy writ presented by the supplicant are incorporated into the scriptures as a new Book of Ezra. A new sect will have been born.

Note, however, that since its founding the Church of Ezra has officially recognized a total of only four sects, including the Home Faith itself. Not a year goes by that the Great Cathedral does not receive a "new Book of Ezra," but most supplicants never pass beyond this stage. Intriguingly, a handful of individuals *have* successfully completed the second step, but have proven unable to complete the third, possibly manifesting their new Shield of Ezra through trickery or the meddling of the dark powers. This is a topic of great controversy within the Church as a whole, which has yet to agree on how these "heresies" should be treated.

The Heresies

Other than the four recognized sects, there currently exist nearly a dozen unrecognized variations of Ezra's teachings. Most of these heretical cults comprise a single would-be anchorite trying to convert others to their cause, with differing levels of desperation or success, and most heresies die out with their founder.

These heresies have ranged from the flawed but harmless (a Mordentish offshoot which claimed that, since one can choose one's role in the Grand Scheme, there is no Grand Scheme; a vaguely neutral good philosophy which Ezra apparently does not condone) to

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the ridiculous (such as the heresy which claimed Ezra was a man).

At least three heresies have been exposed as frauds created by priests of the Church of Bane to discount Ezra; one of these attempts even managed to pass the second test of the Rite of Revelation.

Currently, however, two heresies have garnered a fair amount of attention within the Church, at least at the level of gossip. The first of these, the Heresy of the Avatar, arose in the wake of the Great Upheaval and insists that Ezra now wanders the Lands of Mist in mortal form. Even more widely debated is the near-legendary Final Sect. Many anchorites, particularly those drawn into numerological study of *The Books of Ezra*, believe that Ezra will establish a total of five sects before She reveals every aspect of Her Grand Scheme. Thus, many believe that a fifth sect *will* someday be founded. However, some anchorites, especially those of Nevuchar Springs, also whisper that the fifth sect will be the Final Sect, and that its emergence will herald that the Grand Scheme is nearing its final fruition, in one form or another.

ORGANIZATION

The Church of Ezra remains young and relatively small. It has not yet grown into the need for an extensive bureaucracy, but it does claim certain structures that all anchorites should know. Although the sects often disagree on matters of Ezra's word, they have to date succeeded in maintaining a coherent organization across the sects.

Titles

Anchorite is merely a general term for one of Ezra's clergy, regardless of their position within the Church. It is also the most commonly used term; most anchorites only use their ecclesiastical titles when dealing with internal matters of rank.

A **Warden** stands at the bottom rung of the organizational ladder. They may be lesser priests serving in a temple, or they may be wandering anchorites working to spread the word of Ezra to new lands. As wandering priests, most player character anchorites will hold the title of Warden, regardless of experience level; this rank allows them to enjoy great deal of personal freedom, and they can still receive the sanctuary of the Church (see

Domains of Dread) when they wish, but Wardens hold little actual power within the Church.

An anchorite qualifies for the title of **Toret** simply by establishing a temple that boasts a congregation of at least five followers. A Toret serves as the guardian of his congregation, and thus earns a boost in prestige within the Church. They may request financial assistance from their founding sect (though such requests may not always be fulfilled to the anchorite's satisfaction), and the Toret may occasionally be called upon to act as council for their local Sentire. Any anchorite, including player characters, can earn the rank of Toret merely by founding a small temple; like Warden, the title is independent of experience level. However, their new responsibilities do not lend themselves well to the lives of a traveling adventurer.

Sentires are the leaders of significant temples, or are the overseers of a significant number of smaller temples spread out over a rural area. Sentires often act as the advisors of their respective Bastions. To qualify for the title, Sentires must have at least five anchorites serving under them, and their temples must have a "healthy" congregation, capable of supporting the temple financially without assistance from higher in the Church. Sentires are often associated with the regions in which they hold influence; thus it is common to hear terms such as the "Sentire of Sturben." Even more so than the Toret, a Sentire's days are filled tending to his congregation and managing the daily affairs of his temple. Thus, this rank is generally not appropriate for player characters.

Bastions are the leaders of the recognized sects; the title is granted to the founder of a new official sect, who then hands the title to their chosen successor. Since an anchorite must be able to manifest the Shield of Ezra to successfully establish a sect or step in as a successor, all Bastions must be at least 6th level.

Bastions hold considerable influence in their roles, and are occasionally called upon to speak at Bastions' Councils in Levkarest, to determine vital issues affecting the Church.

The **Praesidius** (if male, **Praesidia** if female) is the leader of the Church of Ezra as a whole; the Praesidius is often referred to as Ezra's Champion. There can only be one Praesidius at a time, and the title has been handed down from the Church's founder, Yakov Dilisnya. Although the ruling has ruffled feathers among the other sects, a new Praesidius must always be drawn from the ranks of the Home Faith, the lawful neutral sect. To qualify for the title, a prospective Praesidius must be able to demonstrate that Ezra will personally watch over and guide him safely through the Mists of Death; thus all holders of this title must have reached 9th level.

The titles of Sentire, Bastion, and Praesidius are cumulative. Thus, the current leader of the Church,

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Praesidius Postoya, also holds the titles of Bastion of the Home Faith and Sentire of Levkarest. However, it is considered a breach of etiquette to use any but the most powerful rank. A cynic referring to Praesidius Postoya as the Sentire of Levkarest is implying that he is unworthy of holding any greater title.

Lastly, it is worth mentioning the title of **Bailey**. This is not an ecclesiastic title, and carries no particular rights or responsibilities. Instead, it is a title of respect often given to the eldest (and therefore, presumably wisest) anchorite in a given temple.

Day-to-Day Activities

Regardless of their sect affiliation, it is the duty of all anchorites to make themselves available to their followers, acting as spiritual advisors and offering what aid they can to their congregations. However, the followers of the different sects generally approach this in their own ways.

Borcan anchorites often fill their days in meetings with the wealthy elite, cannily attempting to convince them that it is in their best interest to support Ezra's charities. Of course, these anchorites often find themselves just as busy soothing the fickle egos of Borca's rulers. Mordentish anchorites are likewise active in charitable functions, and typically try to keep their presence as visible as possible.

The anchorites of the Dementlieur sect would never close their doors to the faithful, but neither do they go out of their way to attract followers. If a member of Ezra's congregation is in need, he can always know where to find the clergy—but if he does not seek them out, he may never find them otherwise. The other sects disapprove of the Dementlieur sect's withdrawn ways, but Bastion Secousse's scribes appease their peers by producing wondrously illuminated copies of *The Books of Ezra*. These exquisite tomes are highly valued by other anchorites as works of art. In recent years, the Dementlieur sect has obtained a printing press, and now performs an even more valuable service: They can now produce Ezra's scriptures for a fraction of the cost and time it previously took. Now even the most humble Toret can afford a copy of the scriptures for his temple.

Lastly, the Necropolitan anchorites are known for their active schedules. Each and every day they can be seen wandering the streets, preaching the Word of Ezra to passers-by. The proximity of their prophesied Fall of Night has driven them into a desperate zeal to win new converts.

Holy Days/Important Ceremonies

Ezra's clergy perform weddings, funerals, and any other ceremonies or functions their congregations might require. Anchorites are encouraged to adapt their

ceremonies to conform to local customs whenever appropriate.

All temples reserve each fifth day as a day of worship. However, these days of worship count off from the founding of that specific temple, so the exact times when the anchorites hold services will vary from temple to temple. To maintain good standing in the congregation of Ezra, a follower must (in addition to living by her teachings, of course) attend services regularly to renew their vows to follow Ezra, and Ezra's vow to guard over them. Worshippers must also tithe 10 cp each year to support their temple and show their thanks.

Individual temples also adopt the holy days of their local congregations. Thus, while the Mordentish sect shows their respect to Nocturne in October, the Nevuchar Spring sect would ignore that holiday while holding Darkest Night in deepest reverence.

In fact, all temples hold only one holiday in common: The Feast of the First Epiphany, held on the first day of worship in May (and thus the Feast is held on different dates from year to year and from village to village). The Feast is a joyous remembrance of Ezra's first appearance to Yakov Dilisnya. Celebrations are marked by a feasts, dances, and the reciting of blessings received in the past year. In fact, the Feast of the First Epiphany is often folded into the traditions of local spring festivals.

Priestly Vestments

Members of the congregation are expected to dress in white when attending ceremonies, but need not dress in any special manner otherwise. Likewise, anchorites are not required to don priestly vestments unless performing ceremonies, though many often do. The traditional anchorite garb consists of emerald green robes with white trim. The width and pattern of this trim denotes the priest's ecclesiastic rank; in general, the more white visible, the higher the rank.

BASTIONS OF FAITH

By the current year, the Church of Ezra has spread throughout the Core. Many of its temples are humble, boasting only a few anchorites and small congregations; some villages are served only by a single anchorite holding services in a local barn or tavern. Regardless, the faith is continuing to grow. Only those domains hosting state-sponsored religions continue to actively resist the spread of Ezra. G'Henna's inquisition actively hunted proselytizing anchorites in the years before it disappeared; a series of anchorites have tried to establish temples in Valachan, only to find themselves tangled in Von Kharkov's repressive policies just before vanishing entirely; and the powerful Church of

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Bane has all but barred the open worship of Ezra in Nova Vaasa and Hazlan.

The Great Cathedral

The Great Cathedral towers above the rooftops of Levkarest, in Borca. Having taken sixty years to build, its last stones were laid in place less than a decade ago, and it remains a pristine testament to Ezra's glory. The towering stained glass windows sparkle, and the marble floors still gleam. The cathedral owes much of its beauty to the sculptures created by the late artist, Nikolai Pyotrovich. A glorious statue of Ezra looms over the altar, beatifically watching over her clergy and congregation, while monstrous gargoyles, symbolizing the Legions of the Night, cluster near the vaulted ceilings and atop the Cathedral roof. A viewer with a keen eye will note Pyotrovich's eye for detail; all of the stone Legions, no matter where they may be perched, are caught in a fearful pose, shying away from the icon of Ezra. Some old anchorites have even claimed that on dark nights, they have seen some of those graven fiends crawling along the shadowed ceiling attempting to hide from Ezra's gaze.

Although only the vast chamber of worship is open to the public, two annexes break off from the rear of the mighty cathedral. These lofty chambers house many of the Home Faith's clergy and serve as the ultimate administrative headquarters for the entire Church. Each annex also houses two smaller, private worship halls where anchorites—or influential patrons—can pay their respects to Ezra in private.

The controversial statue of Yakov Dilisnya, also carved by the great Pyotrovich, still stands at the foot of the steps leading up to the Great Cathedral's front doors. It bears an inscription inviting all who pass to enter Ezra's temple and her faith. Yakov's memorial is also his headstone; the body of Ezra's first anchorite is sealed beneath the statue's base.

The remains of Dilisnya's successors are laid to rest within the catacombs beneath the cathedral; only the bones of the most pious and ardent defenders of the faith can hope to ever be interred within those stone walls. Rumors hint of additional chambers at the ends of hidden passages, where Praesidius Postoya himself has removed the blight of lycanthropy from at least one member of his flock—for an appropriate tithe, of course.

Praesidius Levin Postoya

Born in 697, Levin Postoya's eyes are hidden behind thick glass lenses, his vision all but destroyed by the decades he spent laboriously and lovingly scribing copies of *The Books of Ezra*. His illuminated tomes are now as highly sought among collectors as the Port-a-Lucine texts. However, although he may be nearly blind physically, his

insight remains sharp and penetrating enough to stun many of those who would debate his decisions.

Postoya's predecessor, Praesidius Raskolka, was an outspoken supporter of the faith, who often decried the lascivious lifestyle of Lady Ivana Boritsi, and opposed her family's attempts to extort the Church for taxes and, after Ivan Dilisnya assumed control of the law, sundry bribes. Shortly after the ceremonies celebrating the completion of the Great Cathedral in 745, Praesidius Raskolka fell gravely and inexplicably ill, wasting away over the course of the winter. Raskolka appointed his trusted advisor Postoya as the new Praesidius from his death bed.

Praesidius Postoya is still relatively new to his post, but he has proven to be much more politically shrewd than his predecessor. Rumors persist that Postoya has been making a series of complex deals with both Ivan Dilisnya and Ivana Boritsi, secretly funneling "protection money" to them both. While most who know of these transactions believe Postoya is merely acting to ensure the continued survival of his faith, some believe that Postoya has decided to take advantage of the feud which has flared to life between the cousins, with the ultimate goal of using each to destroy the other.

Praesidius Levin Postoya, human male, A11: AC 10; MV 12; hp 55; THAC0 14; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon; SZ M (5'10"); ML steady (12); Str 9, Dex 13, Con 10, Int 16, Wis 17, Cha 16; AL LN.

The Borcan Chain of Succession

Praesidius Yakov Dilisnya (666-698)
Praesidia Donella Borovsky (698-716)
Praesidia Kristyn Stoyista (716-735)
Praesidius Alexei Raskolka (735-746)
Praesidius Levin Postoya (746-)

Levkarest Anchorite Characters

Anchorite characters who follow the Home Faith follow the rules for lawful neutral anchorites presented in *Domains of Dread*.

The Chapel of Pure Hearts

Half a century the founders of the Mordentish sect raised enough funds to build a small but respectable chapel in Mordentshire, on a lot adjoining the open-air marketplace. The anchorites continue to hold services there to this day; weddings and Feast of the First Epiphany ceremonies have often been known to spill out into the marketplace.

The entire Chapel of Pure Hearts could easily fit within the public worship hall of the Great Cathedral. The building consists of little more than the worship hall,

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a few offices in the rear, and large cellar the anchorites use for various purposes. Most anchorites live elsewhere in or around Mordentshire, or merely visit on a regular basis as they make their rounds from one remote Mordentish hamlet to the next.

Although the Mordentish priests studiously maintain their temple, even decorating it with fresh-cut flowers in the spring and summer, they have made very few attempts to transform their humble temple into the glorious shrine some of their peers would expect. Only a colorful stained glass window above the temple doors, depicting an icon of Ezra, betrays any attempts at splendor. The reason for this humility is simple: the anchorites under Bastion Otrava consider their snug chapel a purely temporary home.

The ruined church of an abandoned faith lies just north of town, crumbling into ruin since a bolt of lightning in the fall of 579 reduced it to a guttered shell. Today the ruined church has crumbled away to almost nothing, just a few pitted stone walls jutting up from the grassy loam. The churchyard surrounding the old ruin has remained in use, however, and the anchorites have taken it upon themselves to maintain the weathered old graves. The sect's eventual goal is to raise enough funds to rebuild and resanctify the old temple into a worthy house of Ezra's worship. Although the rebuilt church will never challenge the Great Cathedral in size or grandeur, it will serve well as a loving tribute to Our Guardian in the Mists.

The clergy received a major boost towards this goal just over a decade ago, when the Weathermays granted the ruined church's property to the sect. It is fairly well known that the Weathermays offered this gift to the sect in repayment for saving the life of the young Gennifer Weathermay-Foxgrove after a brutal animal attack; some wagging tongues hint the Weathermays may have also been influencing the anchorites to keep various unsavory aspects of that attack a secret.

Despite this generous gift, the Mordentish anchorites remain many years and thousands of gold pieces away from their goal. Since the anchorites spend most of their excess funds to support smaller temples and various charities across Mordent, Verbrek, and beyond, the day when Ezra's new cathedral is complete is but a distant dream.

Some preliminary work has been done, however, as workers test the foundations of the ruined church. Intriguingly, a pair of surveyors claim to have recently discovered a half-flooded, forgotten cellar or catacombs beneath the old church, its entrance sealed by rubble and earth for nearly 200 years. The Church has not yet had the opportunity to thoroughly search those claustrophobic tunnels, however.

Bastion Sarlota Otrava

Sarlota Otrava has been the Bastion of Mordent for just under a decade. A statuesque beauty with pale skin and raven hair and eyes, she always covers herself head to toe in the green and white robes of her faith. Her only addition to the traditional wardrobe is the long, black satin gloves she wears at all times.

Bastion Otrava is extremely popular among the faithful, not just for her compassion and personal charisma, but for her striking similarity to Ezra herself. Bastion Otrava is not quite as popular among her clergy, however. While the congregation finds Otrava's chaste mannerisms appealing, those who deal with her daily sometimes consider her aloof. Striking closer to the heart of her follower's complaints, however, is that like the two Bastions of Mordent before her, Sarlota Otrava migrated here from the Home Faith in Borca. There is a growing sentiment among the Mordentish anchorites that their Bastion should be a native. Although Otrava refuses to discuss the matter publicly, she has let her closest advisors know that she will ensure her successor is Mordentish born.

Born in Levkarest in 711, Sarlota Otrava grew to be an enticing young beauty. So much so, in fact, that in 729 she caught the eye of Ivana Boritsi, and was unwillingly transformed into an ermordenung. Ivana had recently been rebuffed by a handsome anchorite, and she sent her new minion out to seduce and destroy the man. Sarlota joined the priesthood to gain access to the priest, never expecting that her ruse would become her life. The anchorite was suffering a crisis of faith; almost as soon as Sarlota introduced herself to her prey, he decided that his heart truly lay with the teachings of the Mordentish faith. A lethal assassin, but still an inexperienced girl, Sarlota followed the anchorite as his protégé.

In Mordent Sarlota was removed from the direct influence of her creator. She continued to feign interest in the faith by studying the priests' text. Before she knew it, Sarlota had become devout. She was one of the Legions of the Night, an ermordenung, a creature that could exist only to spread death. Yet here she was taught that even she, a true monster, could find redemption. Her plans to murder her mentor were forgotten as she opened herself to Ezra's message, and as time passed her hatred for her condition softened into a silent regret that she could never confess to the true, growing love she felt for her mentor.

Three years later, Sarlota was still faithfully serving under her mentor as he wandered the lands, her love still unspoken. While trying to establish a small temple to Ezra in Arkandale, her mentor was struck down in battle with one of the nefarious Timothy clan—one of the unrepentant Legions of the Night. As he lay dying, Sarlota's mentor asked her to kiss him at last, confessed

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that he had always known of her feelings, and shared them. Weeping, Sarlota said she could not, confessing her true nature; that her touch was death. Her mentor admitted that he had always known that as well. But he could die in peace, knowing that he had saved her.

Sarlota's mentor died in her arms, and her faith grew to rival that of any Bastion. She returned to the Mordentshire temple, serving Wachter's successor Bastion Denisovich with dedication and distinction. Though some may have resented Denisovich's decision to name Sarlota his successor, none could deny that she had earned the title.

Bastion Otrava keeps her lethal touch a carefully guarded secret, never allowing anyone to even brush against her bare skin. While most people believe Otrava has simply made a vow of chastity, she has allowed a select few of her closest advisors to know the truth.

Bastion Sarlota Otrava, ermordenung, A9: AC 9; MV 15; hp 63; THAC0 16; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon or special; SZ M (5'11"); ML champion (15); SA poison; SD poison; Str 9, Dex 15, Con 17, Int 14, Wis 16, Cha 17; AL LG.

The Chain of Succession

Bastion Felix Wachter (698-716)

Bastion Vladimir Denisovich (716-744)

Bastion Sarlota Otrava (744-)

Mordentshire Anchorite Characters

Anchorite characters who follow the Mordentish sect adhere to the rules for lawful good anchorites presented in *Domains of Dread*.

Ste. Mere des Larmes

The Gothic spires of the crumbling Ste. Mere des Larmes cathedral reach out to the sky from the very center of Port-a-Lucine. The anchorites here lead a paradoxical existence, living a detached, hermetic lifestyle in the heart of the Core's most cosmopolitan city.

The anchorites under the wizened Bastion Secousse have made some minor repairs to their cathedral, reinforcing areas that were in danger of collapse, but for the most part they have chosen to preserve the structure's decayed grandeur. If not for the flickering lights seen in the cathedral's windows each night, most locals might still believe the cathedral was deserted.

Most of the anchorites live within a few blocks of the cathedral, though Bastion Secousse personally lives within the cathedral itself with a few of her advisors.

Cocooned within, the priests pore over their rediscovered texts, each anchorite trying to discover their own, personal understanding of the true nature of Ezra and Her Grand Scheme. When not busy in research, the

anchorites heatedly debate each other's philosophies, tearing them down through their own interpretations. To truly understand Ezra, they claim, is to become as one with Her. Many members of this sect believe that true understanding of Ezra can come only with the passing of this life; some theorize that Ezra watches over them now so they can prepare to watch over her faithful in the afterlife. It surprises few to learn that most of the Heresies have arisen from Ste. Mere des Larmes.

The anchorites also continue to explore their crumbling home. Some anchorites (always from other sects) spread rumors that the priests in Port-a-Lucine have found not one, but three hidden, sealed sub-cellars beneath their home, one below the next, and that the priests press further and further into these long-forgotten chambers, the secrets they find grow stranger and stranger.

Perhaps the strangest feature of the Ste. Mere des Larmes, however, is the one which first greets most visitors: the glorious stained glass icon of the "Sainted Mother of Tears" herself, identical in all but a few details to the commonly accepted image of Ezra. It is said that if downtrodden souls pray for relief before the image, the Sainted Mother will sometimes be moved to take their sorrows onto herself. However, if the supplicant is insufficiently worthy, the Sainted Mother may unleash her stored misery onto him!

The anchorites warn of the Sainted Mother's fickle kindness with a tale about two sisters. One of the sisters had a twisted leg, which lamed her and made her rely upon her healthy sister to survive. The lamed sister prayed for the Sainted Mother to heal her twisted leg, so that she might no longer be a burden to her beleaguered sister. The Sainted Mother answered the prayer, and the girl walked out on two healthy legs. Then the girl's sister came, and she too prayed for the Sainted Mother to heal her sister's leg, for the girl was a burden she was tired of carrying. Immediately, both her legs twisted and bent, and she spent the rest of her days begging her healed sister for succor.

Bastion Joan Secousse

Joan Secousse has served as the Bastion of Dementlieu since she founded the sect in 709. Now seventy-four years of age, she has started evaluating candidates to name as her successor.

Bastion Secousse has a round, kindly face and twinkling blue eyes. She wears her long, hair tied in a bun. Once a sandy blond, it has now faded into silver. Bastion Secousse's grandmotherly appearance is instantly shattered as soon as she speaks, however. Her dialogues are often so deeply entrenched in highly esoteric, spiritualistic mysteries that all but her most devoted and learned followers may find their heads swimming. She is

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the type of woman who can convince her listeners that they do not exist; that they are merely an aspect of a dream of an entity than can never hope to understand. Paradoxically, she will then insist that *understanding* is all that matters, and she has little patience for those who cannot keep up with her philosophy.

Bastion Secousse is also one of the Obedient, as are most of her advisors. However, this barely affects their faith or daily life. Yes, when d'Honaire's thugs come calling, the anchorites jump to assist them but for the most part, the anchorites ignore Dementlieu and Dementlieu ignores the anchorites.

Bastion Joan Secousse, human female, A14: AC 10; MV 12; hp 70; THACO 12; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon; SZ M (5'7"); ML champion (16); Str 9, Dex 11, Con 8, Int 15, Wis 18, Cha 15; AL N.

Port-a-Lucine Anchorite Characters

Anchorite characters who follow the Mordentshire sect adhere to the rules for lawful good anchorites presented in *Domains of Dread*.

The Last Redoubt

When Teodorus Raines returned to Nevuchar Springs after being appointed the Bastion of Necropolis, he and his followers wasted no time in establishing a worthy temple. His followers laid siege to the local temple of the Eternal Order, throwing the residing priests out on their ears and attacking those who resisted them. Bastion Raines claimed the temple, filled with its ghastly icons of looming death, in the name of Ezra. His followers then proceeded to smash most of the religious idols and icons they found, replacing leering stone skulls with cracked rubble. Now, somehow, the temple appears even more macabre, having been purposefully crumbled into premature ruin.

From here in the seat of his power, Bastion Raines has worked at a feverish pace to spread his version of the word of Ezra. As the Eternal Order collapses, Raines has spread his influence to fill the gaps, finding a populace all too eager to listen to him, all too convinced that his prophecies are eerily reminiscent of their daily reality. To date, the Nevuchar Springs sect has extended its fingers to nearly every Necropolitan city east of Il Aluk. In many of these cities the anchorites have expelled the priests of the Eternal Order, either destroying or usurping their temples and property. In other cities, however, the two faiths are more equally matched, and continue their verbal and physical skirmishes to capture the worship of the masses.

Raines' sect *has* encountered opposition, however. The Eternal Order has mounted a strong resistance in

Neblus, preventing the Church of Ezra from gaining any footholds in their city. In the cities west of Il Aluk, arriving anchorites find that another usurping faith, the cult of the Overseer, has already filled the cracks of doubt the anchorites play on. Like the Church of Ezra, the cult of the Overseer had been contained to a single city, Martira Bay, in the years before the Requiem. Now the rival faiths reach out from their coastal bases to claim the hearts of the faithful.

Visiting anchorites will notice one feature of the Nevuchar Springs sect immediately: Bastion Raines has decided that it is reprehensible to bar the blessings of Ezra to demihumans, claiming the absence of demihuman anchorites in the others sects to be the result of cultural fears and superstition, not the will of Ezra. To this end, Raines has allowed demihumans into his clergy, three of his closest advisors are in fact elves.

Bastion Teodorus Raines

Bastion Raines is a tall, angular man of thirty, with the face of a scholar but the sleek physique of an athlete. He has close-cropped, dark brown hair, and a thin scar running across his lips, a reminder of his early days as an anchorite in Darkon.

For every convert to his cause, there is another who calls Teodorus Raines a fanatical madman. This he may be, but his faith is pure. Bastion Raines truly believes with all his heart and soul that a monstrous apocalypse is looming on the horizon. He truly believes that he has less than a generation's time to rescue as many souls as possible by bringing them into Ezra's faith. He also believes that as the Time of Unparalleled Darkness falls the Legions of the Night will endeavor to destroy his faithful flock out of spite, fear, and their own evil natures.

Raines is thus a profoundly devout worshipper of Ezra with the noblest of intentions, but he is utterly ruthless in his methods. Raines and his followers believe that the priests of all other religions are luring souls away from Ezra's protection, and thus damning them. If Raines' followers do not murder the clergy of opposing priests openly in the streets, it is merely because they do not wish to risk legal repercussions or frighten off possible converts.

The Fall of Night is near at hand, so Bastion Raines believes, and he will be ready when it comes. In secret chambers within his Nevuchar temple, Raines has imprisoned several examples of the Legions of the Night: werebeasts, a vampire, undead horrors that fled from Il Aluk; anything he can capture. When not preaching fire and brimstone to his faithful, Raines and his trusted advisors spend their time in these secret chambers, torturing these captured monstrosities to discover their weaknesses.

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Bastion Teodorus Raines, human male, A7: AC 2 (plate mail + shield); MV 12; hp 42; THAC0 16; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon; SZ M (6'); ML fanatic (17); Str 12, Dex 10, Con 15, Int 16, Wis 18, Cha 13; AL LE.

Nevuchar Springs Anchorite Characters

Full rules for creating player character anchorites following the Borcan, Mordentish, and Dementlieur sects were provided in *Domains of Dread*. The lawful evil anchorites of Bastion Raines' sect adhere to those rules, with the following modifications.

Spells: Lawful evil anchorites have major access in the spheres of All, Charm, Divination, Guardian, and Healing. They have minor access to the spheres of Protection, Wards, Law, and Combat.

Arms and Armor: As with all anchorites, followers of the lawful evil sect can only wear metal armor. Like the true neutral sect, Bastion Raines allows his followers to use any one-handed weapon, and requires them to carry a shield. Furthermore, he requires that all of his anchorites carry at least one weapon on their person at all times, remaining ever vigilant to the threat of the Legions of the Night.

Shield of Ezra: The lawful evil Shield of Ezra performs exactly as described in *Domains of Dread*, with this effect: The anchorite is rendered immune to all mind-affecting magic. Bastion Raines claims this blessing keeps his anchorites free of corruption.



A YEAR IN RAVENLOFT

... Is a Long, Long Time Indeed

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INTRODUCTION

In June and July of 1999, a Kargatane competition asked people to contribute holidays, festivals and other significant dates that might appear on a Ravenloft calendar. The Kargatane received and voted on more than fifty entries. This compilation collects our favorite contributions to the competition, some of the events that have appeared in other RAVENLOFT products, and a few of the Kargatane's own suggestions.

Ernst Turagdon's Diary

4th August, 753

At long last, today I completed gathering information to help us get by without our *Poor Smythe's Almanac*. Drawden will have to learn to be more careful with the books in future. Of all the possibilities, losing it to the Dripping Thing Lurking Among the Rafters is really most embarrassing. While Mynilar has done his best to find a replacement copy in neighboring domains, it would appear that we had one of the last intact versions.

Nevertheless, this exercise has been most instructive to me. I have, for example, learned that when interrogating small children one should seat them on a *wooden* chair, not a nice upholstered one. I have also learned to never even bring up the subject of alcohol in the presence of Mynilar. The room we interrogated the Invidian merchant in still smells peculiar.

I think I shall send our collection of significant dates to Lady Kazandra. It would seem that the *Almanac* was more than a little out of date with regards to the celebrations and festivals of these lands. (Which frankly should not surprise me for a document that refers to "the recently-crowned King Azalin".) I suspect she will find it useful to plan her holidays.

As for myself, I may try and escape this small bookshop for a journey to Kantora later this year. The first new moon of December occurs on the 7th, if I am to

believe the Mordentish moon-phase device Holder obtained earlier this year. I think I might enjoy a trip to Nova Vaasa around that time . . .

January

Fireworks' New Year Feast

January 1

Rokushima Táiyoo

The inhabitants of this domain believe that explosives and fireworks cast away evil spirits, especially on New Year's Eve. On the day that opens the new year, in this domain *smokepowder* is as precious as gold, since virtually every individual, even infants and the elderly, welcome the New Year in such a fashion. From midnight on New Year's Eve to the next one, the sound of exploding fireworks fills the air, and the entire domain seems to shiver.

Wandering companies of *smokepowder* experts take care of organizing fireworks spectacles. The *Faira no Shoukans* (or "summoners of flames") have for generations provided the best fireworks in all of Rokushima Táiyoo. Their skills have been demonstrated by producing anything from a bright cascade in the void, to a terrifying, fiery dragon. During other times of the year, the *Faira no Shoukans* have been known to appear in other domains.

Fanton Griswold's Day

January, first full moon

Barovia, Tepest, Falkovnia, G'Henna

Fanton Griswold is mostly a children's tale used by parents to scare their children into behaving. ("If you don't do as mother tells you, Fanton Griswold will come for your face!"). On Fanton Griswold's Day, however, no one in the superstitious domains of the middle Core speaks the dreaded name in vain. Griswold is a legendary figure who supposedly bet his face against untold riches to a hag that he could slay a vengeful dragon. Griswold lost, and the hag tore away his face and set him to wander the domains. On the first full moon of the new year, he plods through the snow of each village, looking for a

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house to enter. On these nights, a family must plug up its chimney and surround its house with a ring of salt. Of course, the price of salt generally skyrockets around the new year as a result. Those families who cannot afford the precious mineral must plug their chimneys and wait up all night for three sharp raps on their door. They must respond at the door with three long raps and two short ones. A thumping in the chimney will follow as Griswold attempts to climb down. If the chimney is plugged, Griswold will give up and move on to the next house. The legend says that if Griswold manages to get into the house, he will steal the faces of any children who are present.

Enough occurrences of knocks on doors and sounds in the chimney have actually occurred in Barovian and Falkovnian villages to keep the populations steadfast in their observance of this grim night's rituals.

Remembrance

January, first new moon

Necropolis

The holiday of Remembrance was created by the Eternal Order. The day serves several purposes. Officially, it is a celebration that the dead had not returned in the previous year, and a way of warding them for the coming year. Unofficially, it simply serves as a way of beginning the year with a somewhat joyous occasion. The actual church celebration begins at sundown on the night of the first new moon of a year, when the dead are supposed to be close to the land. During the day beforehand, people put up decorations of paper skeletons and tissue ghosts, bake breads and sweets in the shapes of skulls, take offerings of food, flowers, or other items to the graves of relatives, and children create masks to wear during the celebrations. Jack-o-Lanterns are also carved, due to their supposed power over the dead and undead. (Some of these may manifest unexpected powers—see *DRAGON Magazine* #252.) In the urban areas, great masquerades are often held to commemorate the day, while in rural areas people may privately reminisce, or gather the family for a luncheon picnic among the graves of relatives, symbolically inviting them to dine with them. When sundown arrives, people go to the local Church of the Eternal Order for an all-night vigil, praying to the various powers of death, the dead, the undead, and ancestors to hold back the spirits of the deceased for one more year.

Since the time of the Requiem, this holiday has become less popular among some in the community, as has the Eternal Order. In other areas, the religious aspect has been de-emphasized and is considered more of a secular holiday. Oddly enough, despite the macabre flavor of the holiday, it is one of the few times in the Land of Mists where the undead are quieter than usual.

Whether this is due to the influence and rituals of the holiday or simple coincidence is unknown.

February

Day of Silent Hope

February 3

Barovia

A visitor to Barovia on this date might barely know that any particular event is being commemorated. To an ethnic Gundarakite, however, this day is an important reminder of why hope is worth maintaining in the face of tyranny.

When Duke Gundar was assassinated on this day in 736, the Gundarakites experienced a brief, but liberating sense of freedom. Their joy was cut short when Lord Strahd annexed the lands of the former Gundarak, and Barovian boyars and burgomeisters moved in to rule over the natives.

Gundarakites use this day to privately remember what freedom felt like. Within the confines of their homes, they pray for the strength to live through this time of oppression so that they might again see themselves free of tyranny. Whether praying to Nerull or the Morninglord, this helps maintain the guttering flame of hope they keep deep within their breast for the coming year.

Obviously, the Barovian boyars and burgomeisters do not approve of such an event. Used to keeping secrets from their overlords, however, the Gundarakites are remarkably adept at ensuring no indication of the day's activities is seen by the Barovians. As such, little action has been taken to date to stop this day of prayer.

Lucine Carnival

February 20-23

Dementlieu, Mordent

Every year, the Lucine Carnival attracts people from domains far and wide. It takes place mainly in Dementlieu, as name suggests, but lesser celebrations are also held in Mordent. In Dementlieu it engages workers from all the guilds of Port-a-Lucine. During the year, the merchants' guild imports silk and other textiles from surrounding domains, including the purchase of high-quality wool from the shepherds of Lamordia. They sell these textiles to the weavers, who work day and night for weeks to create shirts and costumes of amazing quality. Elaborate motifs in gold and silver, resembling flowers or jewels, adorn many clothes, along with light *fuseaux* (pants), pompous brocades and soft cloaks. The goldsmiths' guild provides pieces of art manufactured with the utmost care, like bracelets, earrings and necklaces. With the aid of the blacksmiths, they work on metallic masks. In the days before the Carnival women

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and bakers (both in Dementlieu and Mordent) make *nemen*, a traditional sweet made of almonds and grain, and *shrapfses*, a kind of pancake enriched with sugar and spices and unusually crunchy. To undertake all of these activities artisans are sometimes hired from neighboring domains.

Two specialists play an important role in the carnival. One is the famous Lumen Company from Chateaufaux that organizes Port-a-Lucine's lighting. They are so skillful in placing and arranging rows of lanterns and oil lamps that the light they provide seems both magical and natural. The spiral structure of the city streets allows them to arrange these lights like an enormous web centering on the Guild Halls at its core. If the city is seen from a high place, such as the lighthouse, this lighting provides a breathtaking vista.

The other specialists involved are the *Faira no Shoukans* from Rokushima Táiyo (see Fireworks' New Year Feast). They bring a variety of explosives, and illuminate the festival with fireworks that take the shape of beasts and dragons in the night sky.

Census Eve

February 28, once every three years

Falkovnia, Invidia

This is the evening before *Census Day* (see below). Due to the foreboding nature of the Census (when members of a family may not return), the tradition of a *Census Eve* dinner is widely followed amongst Falkovnian communities. The meal is usually one of the best a Falkovnian will ever have, with foodstuffs and wines that have been secreted away for this night finally used. Old oaths are renewed, and births and marriages over the last few years are celebrated again. Drakov has let this practice continue, despite the fragment of hope it brings to his citizens, as it usually leads to many long lost criminals returning home to celebrate with their family, who can be swiftly snapped up by alert Talon patrols.

March

Census Day

March 1, once every three years

Falkovnia, Invidia

One of the constant reminders of Lord Drakov's influence over his people is *Census Day*, a day of pride for the Lord of Falkovnia, and of fear for all his subjects. The taking of the infamous Census has been conducted on this date every three years (due to the length of time it takes to process the reports from each Census) ever since its induction in the year 701. The 18th and most current Census was taken in 752. Drakov initiated the Census after his first failed invasion of Darkon in 700, to determine the number of fit troops that might be available

for use in his campaigns against the wizard-king. It has since become his personal inventory of the masses he commands.

Falkovnian citizens hear of the Census' imminence at the beginning of the appointed year, the news spreading across the Core lands like wildfire. The reason for its importance is simple. On this day, every Falkovnian is judged and told how they will serve their lord for the next three years of their life.

On the morning of the Census, each citizen must report to their hometown in Falkovnia (or, if born in another domain, to the closest Falkovnian troops barracks) to register their details. These include name, occupation (whether soldier, bureaucrat, trader or slave), hometown, sex, age, race, and rank under Drakov's laws. The ranks, in order of social status, are General, Captain, Lieutenant, Soldier, Trader, Ward of the State, Foreigner, Criminal and Enemy of the State. Visitors to Falkovnian-ruled lands may come to realize that there is very little difference between the status of "Foreigner" and "Criminal". This is also the day when new births—if not already registered—are recorded, and the branding with Drakov's Falcon takes place.

The most dangerous offense a citizen can commit is to *not turn up* to the Census. If a citizen fails to present himself or herself, they are summarily condemned with the rank of Criminal. At the dawning of the next day (March 2nd), a report is drawn up to be presented to the local Captain, including a list of all Criminals. The local militia hunts down these criminals, and if found, they are presented before their Captain for suitable punishment. If they remain elusive after ten days, however, they become an Enemy of the State and are hunted by the Talons. This is a job they perform exceedingly well—they will hunt as long as necessary to catch their prey, and, in most cases, no Enemies live to register for the next Census.

New Year's Day

March 1

Sithicus

March 1st is celebrated by the Elves that have made it through the harsh Sithicus winter alive. The elves pray and fast during the day, giving thanks to the gods and expressing hope for the coming new year. They also mourn and remember those they lost during the previous year. This origin of this holiday is the formation of the domain of Sithicus itself, which occurred during the month of March.

Rose Day

March 9

Dementlieu, Richemulot, Mordent, Necropolis

Rose Day is a day for romance. On Rose Day, it is traditional for young men to present tokens of affection to

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young ladies. It is considered unlucky for a man not to give a gift, or for a young lady not to receive one. It is also considered unlucky if a woman gives a man a gift on Rose Day. Roses are considered an especially lucky gift. Further, on Rose Day it is traditional to place garlands of flowers over the door and windows of one's home. On Rose Day, many cities and villages hold community dances in the evening, a holdover from the ancient origins of the holiday. This holiday is a favorite in Dementlieu, where the wealthy frequently exchange slightly risqué gifts such as wine and lingerie.

Spring Mourning

March 21

Vorostokov

In most lands and domains, the first day of spring is a time of celebration. This is not so in the eternal winter of Vorostokov, however. Spring Equinox has become Spring Mourning, a day in which the people of this frozen land mourn for the loss of normal seasons, as well as those who have passed on during the preceding year. The Boyar and darklord of the land, Gregor Zolnik still insists that his Boyarsky have a day of revelry and celebration within the confines of his hall. The party usually turns gruesome as the werewolves transform to go hunting among the villages. Thus, among the poor villagers, the day has come to signify loss. A typical Spring Mourning involves visiting the graves of those lost the preceding year, followed by sprinkling seeds on the frozen gardens, a symbolic gesture of hope, although mostly futile. As evening comes, the villagers lock themselves in their houses and wait, sleeplessly, for dawn to come, while listening to the howls of the wolves.

April

Semaine de la Mode

April 1-6

Dementlieu

The *Semaine de la Mode* (or Fashion Week) is an event held every year in the ballroom of the Grand Hotel in Port-a-Lucine. During this week the famous and beautiful gather for a series of presentations where gorgeous women from Dementlieu and nearby domains exhibit the styles and clothes that will set the trend for the coming year. Famous couturiers (dressmakers) include Ezio Figari, Jacques Sole, and Catherina Bonaerotto, who is responsible for giving rise to the use of unique hats among the women of high society.

Governor Chief Conseiller (Counselor) Dominic d'Honaire is an active sponsor of this event, and is always in the first row watching with enthusiasm when the models make their appearance. Dominic has, in the past,

been found in compromising positions with the models during the event.

Among the current crop of beautiful ladies who take part in the twice-daily modeling galas is Josephina Antonette Dugarrie, the *Reigne Printemps* (Spring Queen) for the last sixteen years. Many women have wondered at the everlasting beauty of Josephina, which by all accounts has not lessened since the day she was first voted Spring Queen, in 736. Some have stirred emotions by claiming that their own beauty seems to have been lost since Josephina began appearing at the *Semaine de la Mode*. Others spread rumors that she has been to Ludendorf where expert doctors have conducted sensitive operations on her face, or that she wears special makeup. More sinister whisperings imply that Josephina has rarely, if ever, been seen during the day.

St. Nathan's Festival

April 1-7

The Shadowborn Cluster

This festive week marks a gathering of champions in Nidalia to compete in a long tournament to determine the most powerful men in the cluster. Folk travel from miles around to witness the festivities, which include jousting, hand-to-hand combat, and other physical sports. The winners of the tournament are declared on the seventh day, and have the honor of accompanying Lady Faithhold, the ruler of Nidalia, in a quest to root out an evil monster of Faithhold's choosing. (Of course, Faithhold's tainted paladinhood means that these missions may be colored by her own warped view of evil.)

The Day of Unspoken Talents

April 11, once every three years

Vistani

This is a Vistani celebration of, ironically, both pride and humility. It occurs but once every three years, from dawn to dawn. During that period, no practicing Vistana over five years of age will speak, at least in ordinary conversation. To do so would show excessive hubris, and invite some personal disaster. Instead each Vistana, from youngest to oldest, will display and practice whatever talents they have: singing, dancing, cooking, acting, juggling, riding, craft-making, fortune-telling, spell-casting, wrestling, wiggling the ears, you name it. Especially appreciated are hidden talents, and many Vistani will go out of their way to reveal "new" skills on this day.

If circumstances allow, a tribe will, without asking, peacefully but insistently invade the nearest non-Vistani settlement and perform for the residents, for once expecting (and taking) nothing in payment, but looking to the *giorgio* for appreciation and, in the case of contests, fair judging. Outsiders are not asked to join in any of the

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activities or perform for the Vistani, but are looked on very favorably if they do. If there are no neighboring settlements at the time (or if they are simply too hostile), the Vistani will celebrate amongst themselves. No warning is ever given to outsiders that the Day of Unspoken Talents is coming, nor any direct explanation offered of its significance. If necessary, however, a designated, natural storyteller, preferably a child, will recite a fable extolling the virtues of self-love, cooperation, and family pride, while denouncing personal pride and selfishness.

The Vistani are unnaturally brave and secure on this day, and even mortal enemies are strangely reluctant to do anything but watch the festivities.

Bleak Morning (I)

April 21

Falkovnia

Bleak Morning is an unofficial day of mourning in Falkovnia. The dates remembered are those on which Vlad Drakov initiated attacks on Darkon, and horribly failed. Each day is regarded as a day of the dead, as almost every family in Falkovnia has lost at least one relative on the battlefields.

Drakov has forbidden his populace from any outward show of mourning on these days, as they remind him of his defeat. Most Falkovnians, however, hold short, somber sermons in the privacy of their homes or with families to venerate the dead, and pray, against all probability, that Vlad will not send their sons out to war again.

Several bards have written songs and dirges especially for these days. The most infamous is a satiric song, 'My Friends Are Dead But Still They Dance'. It is accompanied, when performed, by stiff, jerky dancing. The song is most popular with Falkovnian children, but even they are wise enough not to sing it in the face of the Talons.

May

Feast of the First Epiphany

Early May

Borca, Mordent, Dementlieu, Necropolis and others

The Feast of the First Epiphany is an important holiday for the Church of Ezra, held on the first day of worship in May. The exact date of the holiday varies from region to region. For more information on this event, see the article "Anchors of the Faith" within *The Book of Secrets*.

Bolshnik Day

May 20

Nova Vaasa

This date marks the birthday of Prince Othmar of the Bolshnik family, the most powerful in Nova Vaasa. In Kantora, where the Bolshniks live, the morning celebrations involve a parade of the family's cavalry and militia, as they march to Castle Stonegard for inspection by the Prince.

The event, however, which drives most of the activity on this day, is Prince Othmar's gracious reduction of the sales tax from 100% to a paltry 25% on this day alone. This has a massive impact on the markets of the cities, with merchants trading at a frenzied pace as they try and take advantage of the "low" tax rate. Horse trading in particular is popular, with many breeders bringing their youngest foals to market especially for this day.

Prince Othmar also sponsors a competition for the finest horse of the market, as judged by the Captain of the Prince's cavalry. It is a great honor for a horse breeder to have one of their horses selected by the Captain, and usually dramatically increases the asking price for their horses.

June

Meistersinger Contest

June, Summer Solstice

Kartakass

This day serves both a political and a social purpose in the domain of Kartakass. Not only is it a celebration of music and song for the people of the villages of Kartakass, it elects the *Meistersinger* for the coming year in each village. It is a birthright of all born in Kartakass to challenge for the position of Meistersinger.

The event actually begins the night before the summer solstice, when the Meistersinger throws an extravagant masquerade at his or her place of residence. Invitations are issued to many of the wealthy residents, but any bards who wish to attend may do so without a written invitation. Within the major townships of Skald and Harmonia, costumes at this masquerade can be extremely elaborate and expensive. Vast quantities of *meekulbrau* can be found at the party in almost any village.

The purpose of the gathering is to allow intending challengers to the current Meistersinger to sign up for the competition to follow on the summer solstice. It is the birthright of any Kartakan citizen to challenge the Meistersinger at the annual contest, but in reality the expensive costumes and aristocratic nature of the parties in the larger towns means that poorer bards are unable to sign up for the contest. Of course, most Kartakans would also suggest that a poor bard is an unlikely candidate to be able to defeat a Meistersinger!

After signing up, the contestant must sing a prelude to the guests, to preview their singing abilities.

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The next day, at dusk, the entire village gathers to listen to the singing contest at the local common. In Harmonia, this is held at the Amphitheater, while in Skald the common lawn at the center of Upper Skald is used. In smaller towns, the local hall or tavern may be used. So important is singing in the lives of the Kartakans that this event is extraordinarily popular, leaving the rest of the town practically deserted.

Before the contest begins, and out of sight of the audience, a traditional toast is made by the Meistersinger to his competitors.

“Oh, let us sing with joyful tones a song that stirs us to our bones. And should we fail to win the crown, oh, let us willingly step down.”

The battle between the Meistersinger and challengers takes place over several rounds. In the first round, the competitors enter the arena and all begin singing concurrently. Each sings a different song, competing in both volume and timbre for the audience’s attention. Contestants leave the arena (and the competition) if they find themselves unable to attract an audience among the chorus of voices, or if they find their voice incapable of singing for such an extended period of time (as this battle may last for half an hour or more). Once the number of competitors has been reduced to a more manageable number, each competitor sings individually to the audience. Based on the audience reaction, the current Meistersinger selects five challengers to continue into the second round.

The next component is a contest of rhetoric (although many will claim that this is more about insults than witty retorts). Each of the five remaining contestants are asked why they are fit to rule that village, as the others interject with quips and jests. At the end of the round, the Meistersinger asks the audience for applause for each of the contestants, and judges the most popular.

The third round is a one-on-one challenge between the sitting Meistersinger and the winner of the second round. Each sings a *mora* for the crowd, most frequently a traditional song that the audience knows. The audience then selects the winner, usually chanting the name of the bard they wish to rule as Meistersinger for the coming year. It is a rare occurrence for a Meistersinger to be ousted in one of these contests, with most retaining the position for many years.

(See the novel *Heart of Midnight* for additional details.)

Night of Bright Truths

June, first full moon

Nova Vaasa

The Night of Bright Truths is the evening on which Nova Vaasans believe the moon to be the brightest of the entire year. This is a night when Bane is closely watching those

who rule Nova Vaasa, ensuring that the divine right of rulers is maintained, and that none are overstepping their power. As Bane is considered to be paying close attention to his followers on this night, it is also believed that no lies can be told.

This makes the Night of Bright Truths an important political day for Nova Vaasans. A council of nobles, representing each of the five ruling families, meets in Kantora on this night to discuss and resolve important issues. Although only one of a series of regular meetings, many decisions are actively delayed until this night in order to ensure that the most honest and responsible outcome is reached.

Among the rest of the people of Nova Vaasa, this night is usually considered a night for family to gather and talk of the past year, noting the lessons they have learned and the goals they have achieved. This is done to humbly inform Bane of the many ways in which they have improved themselves, thereby increasing their station in life.

This is also a favorite night for young men to propose to their potential future brides. It is said to guarantee the couple a long and fruitful marriage if the lady says yes on a night when no lies can be told.

Noctis Lupus

June or July, during full moon

Verbrek

Noctis Lupus is a holy day devoted to the Wolf God. The god embodies ferocity and fighting and the day’s activities follow similar lines. During the day, the werewolves who celebrate this occasion hold competitions with each other. Each pack will hold its own celebrations, although sometimes more than one pack may get together for the nighttime revelries. The competitions during the day include various forms of fighting between the werewolves, and occasional fight with captured humans. One favorite sport played on this holy day involves splitting the pack up into four teams. Four goals are set up on a field, one facing each of the compass points. A skull of one of their brethren is used to represent their god. The team to get the skull between their goal is honored or blessed by the god.

As night falls, the werewolves gather around a site chosen and prepared earlier. A huge bonfire is constructed, and nearby trees are decorated with runes and pictographs. Some of these are prayers to the Wolf God, while others depict the life of the werewolves. There is always one tree chosen as the totem (sacred pillar) for the night which is decorated from top to bottom with furs, feathers and skins. The werewolves of the pack socialize until a few hours before midnight, when the music is commenced. Harsh drumbeats are fervently played by some of the werewolves. The werewolves use

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peculiar instruments, including dead trees which have been hollowed out and turned into some sort of drum. The werewolves start dancing around the fire, chanting, screaming, roaring, and howling at the moon. As midnight passes, an elder or dominant werewolf will make a sacrifice of a small animal (but it may be something larger, such as a stag or human). The dominant werewolf will do this by ripping out the throat of the sacrifice, and filling a sacred bowl with the victim's blood. The bowl is blessed by one of the priests, and then passed around for each to drink from.

Another special event this night is the Moon Dance. The dance is an offering of body and soul to their god, who is symbolized by the moon. Five werewolves are chosen to perform the Moon Dance. This bloody ritual is conducted by taken long strips of leather, and placing them through gashes under the skin of the nominated dancers. The other end of the leather strap is tied loosely around the totem pole, allowing the dancer to move easily around the tree. The werewolves then dance around and around the totem until they are disconnected from the pole by the leather or (worse) their flesh tearing, or until they collapse from exhaustion. On rare occasions, they may reach sunrise.

While the dance continues, the rest of the werewolves will watch or celebrate by indulging their passions for blood and violence. This may include killing or hunting other smaller animals, and sometimes an unlucky human captive will be their plaything for the evening.

Alfred Timothy and his family will always lead the rites and celebrations for their own pack. Typically, Timothy will use the area of the Circle for their celebrations.

July

Summer's Night

July 10

Lamordia, Dementlieu, Falkovnia, Mordent

This holiday, which started in Lamordia, has spread slowly to its bordering domains. This holiday started in Lamordia as a celebration of the warmest day of summer, and is said to keep winter's grasp away for a longer time. People in Lamordia celebrate this holiday by shedding their bland and dark garments and wearing light and bright colored clothing, as well as having a festival dedicated to the time of summer (and to a lesser degree surviving the harsh Lamordian blizzard that is winter). Before the festival, women go out during the day and collect bright flowers with which to weave a mask. They ignore white flowers and darker blooms, preferring bright colors to match their clothes. The men also gather flowers and form crowns from them, however their colors are limited to whites and dark hues.

For the duration of the celebration the men represent the time of winter and the women are a representation of the summer season. Near twilight, people gather in a forest meadow away from the village and begin the celebration with a traditional dance, which represents the summer conquering the winter. Many feel this traditional dance must be done or the summer will no longer continue and winter will arrive abruptly. Others believe in this to a lesser degree, believing that there will be an early winter if the dance is not performed.

In the surrounding domains this holiday has spread to, the superstitious elements have been lost (though the dance is still performed), and it has become more of a midsummer's festival during which masks are worn. In these other domains the masks can range from elaborate feathered monstrosities in Dementlieu to painted wooden masks in Falkovnia.

Singing Tree Day

July 12

Kartakass, Sithicus

On this day, many people from Skald, Harmonia, and other communities travel to a massive and ancient hollow oak tree that stands in the woods west of Skald. All of the pilgrims first gather outside Skald where, with the aid of some volunteers, the two meistersingers give to all the new participants a flask of *meekulbrau* and a scroll containing a *mora*. People who have taken part in a previous Singing Tree Day keep their empty flasks, filling them from a barrel provided by the Meistersinger of Skald, and their scroll. At midday, they form a procession to the main square of the Skald and then, after an opening song (sung by everyone) they depart, guided by the meistersingers of Skald and Harmonia (dressed in green and brown). During the subsequent 3-hour march all chant some suitable *mora*. As they enter the glade in which the tree stands, Skald's Meistersinger calls up the god of music, Milil, and all the spirits of the forest to bless the gathering. At the same time, Harmonia's Meistersinger plants a sapling of meekulbern, praying that it enriches the earth as music enriches mortal life. Everyone then drinks from his or her flask, and camps in the glade.

Around 4 PM a traditional singing contest begins. Every singer sings the *mora* on his or her scroll, and the crowd elects a winner and five runners-up. A small piece of bark from the sacred tree is given to each runner-up. Usually, they fix it to a string, making a pendant that is rumored to empower *mora* related to the forest. The winner, in addition, receives three leaves from the tree and is expected to enter the tree's hollow. There, the winner improvises a *mora*. A popular belief holds that, if correctly interpreted, the song will give hints on the bounty of the weather and the crops of the next year,

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since it is reputed to be inspired by the tree, a spirit of the land. Attending scholars are charged with the task of writing the song down. Finally, the two Meistersingers read the text of the *mora*, and break up the gathering. Werebeasts often hide among the crowd to feed on loiterers.

A similar occurrence, called “Prophecy Day”, takes place in Sithicus. Two elven burgomasters lead the procession to the Prophet Tree, offering cider to all the participants. After ceremonies similar to the Kartakan ones, they ask the participants for a volunteer. This volunteer will be chained to the Prophet Tree, charged to sing its vaticination. If the next year will be bountiful and prosperous the elf will intone a neat sweet melody. Otherwise the song that is sung will be a mournful dirge, similar to the one previously used by Lord Soth to close the borders of Sithicus. Since the singer cannot stop his voice while he’s singing, if the song is of the latter type the singer may go mad. Thus, while it is risky to chain someone to the tree, it is the only way to for the burgomaster to ensure a prediction. Regardless of the outcome of the prediction, the volunteer is regarded as a hero by all.

Flaming Horse Festival

July 27

Hazlan

This is the only major festivity permitted in Hazlan, and is a result of Hazlik’s life in his homeland of Thay, where the fire god Kossuth is worshipped. In the lead-up to this day, a wooden horse is built in every town by skilled craftsmen, with the finest wood available. Artificers work on these horses, placing iron cylinders throughout the wooden constructions containing pockets full of flammable oils.

On the day of the celebration, endurance contests for the men and boys of the village are organized, and the community eats meals together in the common-houses. At night, the artificers set alight the cylinders placed within the wooden horses, giving the impression that the mane, the tail and the hooves of the horse are burning. Eventually, the entire horse is in flames, forming a large bonfire around which celebrations continue into the night.

August

Good Trollings Day

August 1

Mordent

Good Trollings Day (referring to its use in fishing, not in the monster) is a time of celebration in Mordentshire. For a period of two weeks, the very best fish that are pulled out of the Sea of Sorrows are saved in tanks, and on August 1st, they are thrown back into the sea. The exact

reason for this is unknown, but it is a ritual that has been performed for almost 200 years, and the inhabitants of Mordentshire are not about to break tradition now.

After the very best are given back to the sea, the people of town feast on fish and vegetables, and a type of alcohol flavored with boiled seaweed. The feast is held on the docks, and small candles held in paper globes illuminate the festivities.

Bleak Morning (II)

August 14

Falkovnia

See Bleak Morning (I), April 21.

Bleak Morning (III)

August 26

Falkovnia

See Bleak Morning (I), April 21.

September

Bleak Morning (IV)

September 1

Falkovnia

See Bleak Morning (I), April 21.

Cloudberry Harvest

September

Tepest

Cloudberry harvest is a type of fruit gathered by Tepestani to make the sweet cloudberry wine. The natives have found cloudberry almost impossible to farm, so the harvest period involves excursions into the forests of Tepest to find the wild growths of the cloudberry bush.

Unfortunately, cloudberry harvest is most often found in remote locations, on steep hillsides near the lakes and rivers of the region. Even more unfortunately, the end of fall marks the peak of goblin raids and attacks as they attempt to store food for the coming winter, so there is much danger for the harvesters. As a result, the harvesters always work in groups during the day, usually with one of the stronger men of the village to guard. It is a rare year, however, when someone is not lost to the troublesome goblins.

The completion of the harvest is marked by a day-long festival in the village, celebrating not only the harvest end, but the last great gathering before winter sets in. The day is spent tying bright ribbons around the village, and beginning the crush of the harvest of cloudberry.

After the day’s joviality, the town gathers in the evening for a slightly more serious affair. In front of a large fire, a captured goblin is sacrificed by one of the

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harvesters. This is both a sacrifice to the gods to ensure a good harvest next year, and a memorial to those who lost their lives during this year's harvest. Often, the person chosen to make the sacrifice is one who was close to a victim of the harvest goblin attacks.

After the last screams of the goblin have ceased, the townspeople eat together, and drink the first bottles of last year's cloudberry wine. It is said that if the previous year's harvest produces a high-quality wine, the coming winter will be milder and easier to bear. Many have noted that a good wine can warm many cold winter's nights, so there is probably a lot of truth to this belief!

Summer's End

September 1-7

Barovia

For one week, the buildings of the Village of Barovia are decorated with red, orange, and yellow streamers, signifying the colors of autumn and the ending of another summer. On the final day, there is a large feast where everyone gathers in the town square, where tables are set up and everyone eats together. The festival is held in late summer/early fall, when there is still plenty of light. Everyone is still inside before dark (not even this yearly celebration can keep the villagers in Barovia out past dusk), but many households join together to continue the revelries inside.

Dancio

September 14

Invidia, Richemulot

This day is devoted to the art of dancing with context to romance and passion. Typically it is celebrated mainly among the upper classes, but other citizens also enjoy this day in a different style. Large social functions, such as balls, are held inviting an array of local people and others from surrounding domains. The festivities start early in the morning and continue well into the night. The balls are elegant and regal affairs, with awards given for best couple, best dressed, and other categories. The host is expected to provide the prizes for those honored with awards. All guests are expected to participate in the dancing, which includes waltzes and other formal ballroom styles. The host will sometimes have a theme for the gathering, such as Masquerade or Fairy Tale.

Among the poorer classes, other forms of celebration take place. The taverns throughout these domains prepare feasts of food and wine and serve on the street, where dancers perform around blazing fires. Unlike the refined steps among the aristocracy, the dances performed here are generally rowdy, taking a more energetic form. The atmosphere is friendlier than at the formal affairs, and the celebrations usually continue into the night, until the alcohol disappears.

The date falls on the birthday of the head of Richemulot's Dance Academy, Hellene Kougler, who founded the tradition. She introduced the celebration to Invidia shortly after Bakholis' death (730), where the event caught on with a passion.

Hellene, however, was not the true founder of this day. She first observed the event when accompanying a group of Vistani. Once she had recorded what she saw, she brought it back to Richemulot, where she introduced the concept to the aristocracy of that domain. The Vistani celebrate this day in a similar fashion, and with exceptional intensity. The Vistani sometimes become so involved with their dancing that they dance themselves into hallucination, or until they collapse.

White Day

September 23

Dementlieu, Richemulot, Mordent, Necropolis

White Day is the counterpart to *Rose Day* (see March 9). On White Day, it is young ladies who are to present young men with gifts. As with Rose Day, it is considered unlucky for a woman not to give a gift, or for a young man not to receive one. As before, it is believed to be unlucky for a man to give a woman a gift of White Day. A box of white candies is considered an especially lucky gift. Further, on White Day, it is traditional to decorate the door and window-frames of one's home with white streamers. As with Rose Day, many communities hold evening dances to celebrate this holiday. White Day is particularly popular in Dementlieu, where the Masque de Couer, a prominent yearly masquerade, is held.

Harvest Festival

Late September/October

Karina, Invidia

Invidia has increasingly become known for its fine quality wine and other exotic drinks. As the popularity of its produce has grown, so has the size of the annual Karina Harvest Festival. Taking place over the week before the first full moon in October, the population of Karina more than doubles for the duration of the event.

The Festival is a grand event, which encompasses most of East Karina. Essentially, the week is spent drinking and celebrating the end of the Invidian harvest, while partaking in the vast array of alcoholic beverages the region produces. As the city is usually overflowing during the occasion, the celebrations are literally held anywhere, spilling out onto the streets from wine gardens, or at temporary marquees where winegrowers try to convince drinkers of the superiority of their drink.

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Several events are held during the Festival. On the third day, a wine-tasting contest is held, with the most respected vintners of the area judging the winner in various categories. The winners invariably run out of produce by the end of the Festival four days later. Weddings are often scheduled during the Festival, and when this occurs it is usually permissible for any onlooker to join the celebrations. In some of the seedier locations of Karina, drinking contests are held among rowdy groups of inebriated men.

The vilest event on the carnival's calendar is the annual Dog Fights, organized by Nathan Timothy (and some of his associates). Held somewhere in the Falkovnian quarter, the location of the fights is always a closely kept secret, and is attended largely by a contingent of werewolves from the nearby Verbrek. The event involves the pitting of defenseless humans against trained attack dogs, the audience watching with sickening excitement at the battle.

(For additional information on the Harvest Festival and the Dog Fights, see *The Evil Eye*.)

October

Nocturne

October, first new moon

Mordent

On this night, the Mordentish believe that the borders between the living world and the Other Side weaken, allowing the spirits of the dead to enter this world and return to their mortal homes. The way in which this night is marked varies significantly, depending on the desires of the residents of each home.

Those who *want* the departed to return their homes (such as households who have lost a dear family member) place a lit lantern in their window and leave the door unlocked. Any mortal who enters their home should be welcomed with a cooked meal, as the dead return home in the "borrowed" bodies of the living. The guest is treated with the same respect they would give the person whose memory they are honoring.

Others not wishing to admit the spirits of the dead (for whatever reason) hang a lantern from the front door, with a metal sleeve that only allows light to filter through a leering Jack-o-Lantern face. This is said to scare off the spirits who may be returning to the house.

Scholars have noted that there are no records of this custom until late in the 500s (by the Barovian calendar), though none are sure why the tradition suddenly emerged at that time. The tradition appears to be losing popularity, possibly due to the growing relationship with the more cultural and less superstitious domain of Dementlieu. A more likely reason, however, is the growing number of younger people in Mordent treating

the night as an excuse for hooliganism, and a chance to get free dinners.

Bleak Morning (V)

October 6

Falkovnia

See *Bleak Morning (I)*, April 21.

November

Festival of the Dead

November 12

Necropolis

In the time before Azalin used his *doomsday device* and devastated the land, the residents of Darkon spent much time honoring the dead, due to their belief that they would one day rise up and reclaim the land for their own. Since Darkon's transformation into Necropolis, the nature of much of the honoring has changed somewhat, due to the belief that the Ascension has already begun.

Originally a celebration initiated by the Eternal Order, this festival was designed to give thanks to the dead for both the protection they offered the people of Darkon (as evidenced by the dead rising against Falkovnian attacks), and for not yet reclaiming the land of the living for their own. The day was spent in a large town gathering, where residents would wear grotesque masks to represent the dead, and would celebrate with music, drink and revelry for many hours. The celebrations had to end by sundown, however, so that none of the living walked the streets after nightfall. The Eternal Order preached that since the living and the dead could not celebrate together in one place, the living would celebrate during the daylight hours, while the dead would consume the night with their own celebrations. Paintings on the walls of temples of the Eternal Order sometimes depict this event, with fetid corpses wearing human masks, and celebrating with torture and death.

The events of the Grim Harvest, however, have changed the way this holiday is celebrated. As the Eternal Order slowly loses its power without the force of King Azalin to support it, the people are slowly beginning to disregard the original premise of the holiday. The people are beginning to celebrate into the night, ignoring the original reason for remaining indoors at that time.

This effect is less notable the closer one gets to the Falkovnian border. There, where the dead have risen yet again to defend the lands since the Grim Harvest, respect for the dead has continued almost unabated, so in towns like Nartok the holiday has been virtually unaffected.

Primeur

November, 3rd Thursday

Dementlieu, Richemulot

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Primeur is the first day when the wine of the past year is ready to drink. A holiday more for nobility, each noble attempts to be the first to offer his friends the newest wine. As part of the tradition, there is a race of wagons from the nearby wine farms to the noble estates, each driver trying to get an advantage over his rivals by any means. Often terrible accidents happen during this race and the precious liquid is spilled, but such setbacks are nothing compared to the social gain of being this year's Primeur King or Queen.

December

Night of Dark Deeds

December, first new moon

Nova Vaasa

For Nova Vaasans, this day is the exact opposite of the Night of Bright Truths (see June). On this evening, Bane is the most distant he will be all year. Interestingly, this has remarkably different effects on different sections of the community.

In general, people consider it unwise to believe anyone on this night. Business people will refuse to make decisions, no one will ask for advice, and any rumors spread will be dismissed as nothing but rabble-rousing. The council of nobles does not meet during the week either side of the Night of Dark Deeds, for fear of the night's lies tainting their acumen. No one is ever asked to make a vow or a promise on this day, as it is taken to mean nothing without the eyes of Bane watching over the pledge. Families will often gather together in their homes on this night, as on the Night of Bright Truths, but instead they choose to remain silent, preferring the solemn quiet to the possibility of lies being uttered to family members.

While some fear this time of year, and the untruths it brings, others revel in the absence of the watchful eye of Bane. During the night, taverns and gambling houses are filled with people wishing to take advantage of the situation. Houses of ill repute often serve unexpected clientele, and the streets become fighting grounds for those who have repressed their anger in the face of Bane, but are all too eager to take action on this night.

Unsurprisingly, the crime rate soars in the cities of Nova Vaasa on the Night of Dark Deeds. It would seem that for some, the pleasure of indulging their vices extends much further than drinking and gambling, as the number of murders on this night usually exceeds the number in any other month of the year.

Day of the Hawk

December 20

Falkovnia

Though Vlad's real birthday was lost forever in the journey from Krynn to Ravenloft, the ruler of Falkovnia

and his Talons have chosen a specific day to commemorate his birth.

This day was orchestrated some years ago by the head of the Talons, in order to serve as a monument to the greatness of their ruler. Though the folk of the land are loathe to celebrate such an event as Drakov's birthday, they are forced to go along with the celebrations by the Talons.

Across all of Falkovnia, this day is a holiday. People shut their shops down so that they can watch or join the parade devoted to Drakov. No one has to work this day. Some places are forced to shut down by the Talons in order to watch one of the parades.

For Drakov, the day begins at his castle, Draccipetri. Supplicants seeking for a favor from Drakov, or looking to increase boost their image in his eyes, gather and wait to speak with him. These people generally come with gifts, which may include gold, information or even women. A limited number of these people get to speak with Drakov for a short time. Drakov listens, and if he is not pleased with what he hears then the gift-bearer may end up as part of the night's entertainment. Later in the morning, Drakov performs a symbolic branding of several children that have been born since the last Census. Privileged families will often actively seek to have their child branded personally by Drakov.

A little after midday, parades are conducted all over Falkovnia, usually marching through the main road of each town or city. The parades are generally a solemn, dismal affair, as the people are forced to attend by the Talons of every village and town in Falkovnia. Banners are flown, crude floats are made, and fake battles are conducted using wooden weaponry. The Talons watch over the parade, being careful to look for anyone making a mockery of their ruler. In Lekar, Drakov himself joins the parade as it nears its end, and those that make an effort in the parades are sometimes rewarded handsomely later by the Hawk himself.

As the celebrations in the towns die down, a special evening is prepared for Drakov. As many as forty people are impaled on tall, thick stakes within the walls of Draccipetri, and on this night he calls in a small chamber orchestra to accompany their screams. If Vlad does not particularly enjoy the evening, it is possible that the actual orchestra may become part of the bloody entertainment.

Winter's Moon

December (last full moon)

Markovia

The inhabitants of Markovia know pain, perhaps better than any others. The creatures that Lord Markov has created wander the domain, existing in squalor and often agony. They do, however, have their moments of contentment and happiness, and one of those moments is

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during Winter's Moon, a festival held on the last full moon of the year. At sundown, groups of Markovians gather together around a large bonfire and cry towards the heavens, showing that they are strong. After a half-hour of crying to the sky, they feast on the woodland creatures they have hunted and dance around the fire. Many compete in feats of strength and endurance. The celebration lasts well into the morning, by which time most participants have collapsed from the exhaustion of the celebration. To outsiders, the celebration would seem strange, primitive, and brutal, but to the Markovians, it is a wonderful night.

Darkest Night

December, Winter Solstice

Necropolis

Like the Festival of the Dead, this occasion is a result of the legends regarding the Hour of Ascension, where the dead rise up to reclaim the land. Unlike the Festival of the Dead, this day is marked by fear rather than celebration.

On Darkest Night, the moon does not rise over Necropolis. It is said that on this night, the dead are closer to the land of the living than at any other time of the year. The Eternal Order preaches that if the dead have not been properly honored over the past year, this is the most likely time at which they will reclaim the land from the living. In order to avoid attracting the attention of the dead, on this night all lights across Necropolis must be extinguished. Not one candle may burn during the night, lest the dead use it to lead them to the living world.

Since the Requiem in 750, this day has become even more feared by the people of Necropolis. Despite the declining power of the Church of the Eternal Order, this night continues to be commemorated with great fervor, as it is the anniversary of the wave of energy that destroyed Il Aluk. Many residents see this event as the Hour of Ascension itself, and that it was just the start of the dead's reclamation of their lands. As such, the years since have seen even greater adherence to the tradition, with many households even covering reflective surfaces to avoid reflecting the dim starlight of the night. Those who lost friends or family in the destruction of Il Aluk also use this night to sit in silent remembrance of their lives.

(For additional information on Darkest Night, see the *Requiem: The Grim Harvest* boxed set.)

Credits

Martin Becker

Primeur

Breno Colom

Semaine de la Mode

John W. Mangrum

Bolshnik Day

Lee Campbell

New Year's Day

"JorGLEach"

Fanton Griswold's Day

St. Nathan's Festival

Traini Massimo

Feast of the First Epiphany
Nocturne

Christopher D. Nichols

Rose Day

White Day

Quentin Small

Spring Mourning

Scott Stoecker

Good Trolling's Day

(*Contest Runner-Up*)

Summer's End

Winter's Moon

Pierre van Rooden

Bleak Morning

Ian Zammit

Census

(*Contest Runner-Up*)

Canon Holidays

(Compiled by Stuart Turner)

Cloudberry Harvest

Darkest Night

Festival of the Dead

Harvest Festival

Meistersinger Contest

Night of Bright Truths

Night of Dark Deeds



Fireworks New Year Feast

Flaming Horse Festival

Lucine Carnival

Singing Tree Day

"Ryan"

Summer's Night

Trevor Salla

The Day of Unspoken

Talents (*Contest Winner*)

"Strahd4037"

Remembrance

Stuart Turner

Day of Silent Hope

Scott Vandervalk

Dancio

Day of the Hawk

Noctis Lupus

BOOK OF SECRETS: RUNNING RAVENLOFT

ON THE ROAD

WANDERING STORY SEEDS

by Steve Miller
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Here are some items to throw in the way of the player characters as they travel from one place to another, between adventures. I hope you enjoy/find a use for them. Let me know! Remember, there are no random encounters in Ravenloft. I suggest reading them, picking the ones that you think will be of most capable of sparking roleplaying within your party of player characters. (Although, frankly, they also work just fine as hack 'n' slash if that's the group's cup of bloodwine.)

No levels are given, but in general the encounters have been run with parties ranging in levels from 5-10. They were used in a personal campaign of mine that was set in the Southern Core, but they should be easily adaptable to any domain or campaign setting.

DAYTIME ENCOUNTERS

2d10	Result
2	Leucrotta
3-4	Abandoned and Ransacked Bandit Camp
5-7	Wolfweres
8-10	Disguised Order of Guardians Members
11-13	Bandits
14-16	Shepherds and Livestock
17-18	Overseers and Peasants
19-20	Travelers

Leucrotta

There are 1d4 of these foul beasts lurking in a ravine some distance from the road, well out of sight. They use their mimicry ability to lure the party closer and then leap out to attack. The party can search for their lair, but it takes 1d6 hours to locate it even with experienced trackers; the creatures' treasure is in the lair, and there is

a 10% chance that an immature leucrotta of half strength is also present.

Leucrotta (1d4): AC 4; MV 18; HD 6+1; hp 55; THAC0 14; #AT1; Dmg 3d6; SD kick in retreat; SZ L (7' at shoulder, 9' long); ML Elite (14); Int average (8-10); AL CE; XP 975.

Abandoned and Ransacked Bandit Camp

The party comes upon a small campsite. It has recently been abandoned and a search reveals that it was most likely attacked; blood spatters can be seen on the belongings that have been left behind. The firepit contains cold (1-4 on a d6) or lukewarm ashes (5-6). The party cannot determine who attacked the party or how large the group was because the ground is either too hard or too thoroughly trampled.

Searching the camp reveals mostly ruined equipment and spoiled rations, but one of the following items of value is also found (determined by a roll on a d6): **1.** 2d4 copper pieces. **2.** 3d6 silver pieces. **3.** A *potion of healing*. **4.** A scroll of *protection from evil*. **4.** 1d4 gems of random value. **5.** A map of Hazlan. **6.** A scroll with 1d4 random wizard spells on it.

If a wider search of the area is conducted, the party finds 1d3+1 corpses in a ravine, a few hundred yards from the camp. The bodies have already been looted for valuables. The victims were bandits from the camp and are dressed in ragged clothing. They were killed in one of the following fashions (roll d6): **1.** Bitten and trampled to death (by the leucrotta), **2-3.** Butchered by some savage beasts with large claws (either wolfweres or werewolves), **4-6.** Killed with swords.

Wolfweres

The party encounters 1d4 wolfweres. They are posing as lost travelers and ask to join the party. If allowed to travel with the group, they wait until nightfall, use their

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lethargy ability and attempt to slay one party member and then flee. If overwhelmed by player characters, or in some other form of danger, they beg for their lives, offering the party the treasure they are carrying (which should be randomly generated by the Dungeon Master, with the addition of a *pipes of sewers*). These wolfweres are young and have left their home in neighboring Kartakass on a dare. They promise not to attack other travelers if their lives are spared.

If the party kills the wolfweres and this encounter is generated again, there are 1d4+4 wolfweres who are bent on revenge for the killing of their friends. If the party spares the wolfweres and encounters the creatures again, the wolfweres beg for their protection; they are being stalked by two werewolves who are intent on killing them. If the party protects the wolfweres, they are rewarded by the creatures showing them a symbol that if displayed on their clothing will insure their safety from wolfwere attacks while the party is in the Ravenloft Core domains. (This symbol will protect the party from wolfweres 75% of the time, but only if they are civil to the creatures. Conversely, it causes werewolves to attack 50% of the time. There is nothing magical about it, but rather it is a symbol that shows the party are under the protection of powerful wolfweres from Kartakass.)

Whether the party resolves this encounter by killing the wolfweres or showing them mercy, it should be awarded XPs as though the creatures were defeated.

Wolfweres (1d4): AC 3; MV 15; HD 5+1; hp 40; THAC0 15; #AT1 or 2; Dmg 2d6 or by weapon; SA singing brings on *lethargy*; SD iron or +1 or better weapon to hit; MR 10%; SZ M (4'-7'); ML Elite (14); Int high to exceptional (13-16); AL CE; XP 1,400.

Disguised Order of the Guardian Members

These characters are members of a secret society devoted to the gathering of powerful magical items and artifacts that might be used for evil. One or more of the magic items owned by the party may be among those the Guardians seek.

The Guardians ask to join the party as they travel along the road. "Safety in numbers," they say. They take stock of the party if they are allowed to join them.

Once they determine the party is carrying an item they want, their leader reveals their true nature and asks that the party travel with them to the nearest stronghold of the Order. They know as much information about the Ravenloft domains as the Dungeon Master wishes to impart.

If the party refuses to go with the Guardians, they monks depart peacefully. They only engage in combat

against the party if they are attacked first. The Guardians will first attempt to subdue the party, with the leader attempting use *hold* spells to do so. Failing this, they will attempt to withdraw. If the party does not allow their retreat, they fight to the death. If any Guardians escape, they report the attack to other monks. From that point forward, any Guardians encountered in the region will have as many *hold person* spells memorized as they can. They will immediately attempt to capture the party.

Each group of Guardians encountered includes at least one 5th-level cleric, who acts as the leader of the group. All others are 1st-level clerics.

Order of the Guardian senior monk, male human, C5: AC 5 (chain mail); MV 12; HD 5; hp 42; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+1 (enchanted horseman's mace); SA spells; SD spells, turn undead, 25% magic resistance; SZ 5'11"; ML Elite (14); Str 12, Dex 13, Con 17, Int 14, Wis 17, and Cha 14; AL LG; XP 3,000.

Special Equipment: Mace +1, holy symbol

Spells Typically Memorized (6/5/2): 1st—*bless, command, cure light wounds* (x2) *curse, invisibility to undead*; 2nd—*hold person* (x2), *dust devil*; 3rd—*cure disease, locate object*.

Note: This character has the Order of the Guardian kit, described in full in the *Champions of the Mists* accessory. The kit gives these characters a 5% magic resistance per level and grants them a 5% chance per level to recognize famous artifacts on sight.

Order of the Guardian monks, male humans, C1 (1d6): AC 10 (no armor); MV 12; HD 1; hp 4; THAC0 14; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (quarter staff); SA spells; SD spells, turn undead; SZ 5'-6'; ML Elite (14); Int 10; AL NG. XP 35

Special Equipment: holy symbol

Spells Typically Memorized (roll 1d6 to select 1 spell per monk at random): 1: *bless*, 2: *cure light wounds*, 3: *curse*, 4: *command*, 5: *invisibility to undead*, 6: *light*

Note: These men are rank-and-file members of the Order who do not use the Order of the Guardian kit and therefore do not gain its benefits.

Bandits

These cutthroats are comprised of a mix of the Core's outcasts, having fled their homelands for reasons that are often known only to them. They are united in their lust for mayhem and the robbing of innocent travelers, however.

Each bandit group has a preferred set of tactics—some may just rush travelers while others may attempt to set traps or stage clever ambushes. The Dungeon Master is encouraged to differentiate between these bands of marauders should the party encounter more than one, and possibly even give some personality to one or more of

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members. (Of course, it is also possible that the party meets the same group more than once. For example, rather than killing a group of bandits, the party may instead intimidate them into fleeing. In such a case, the bandits will either flee once they recognize the party, or they may have changed their tactics and be laying in ambush. There are no limits to what the Dungeon Master can do with this encounter.)

All bandit groups are led by a 3rd-level fighter while the rest of the group are 1st-level. Most groups are human, but the Dungeon Master can include demihumans in the mix if he or she chooses.

Bandit Leader, human male or female, F3: AC 8 (leather armor); MV 12; HD 3; hp 13; THAC0 18; #AT1; Dmg 1d8 (long sword); SZ M (5'-6'); ML Elite (14); Int high (13); AL NE; XP 120.

Bandits, human males and females, F1 (1d10+3): AC 10 (no armor); MV 12; HD 1; hp 4; THAC0 20; #AT1; Dmg 1d6 (short swords or clubs); SZ M (5'-6'); ML average (8-10); Int average (8-10); AL NE; XP 15.

Shepherds and Livestock

These 0-level NPCs are either young boys (1-4 on a d6) or young girls (5-6) either tending livestock in a field or leading it down the road. They are also accompanied by two herd dogs—German Shepherd-like animals. If they are moving along the road, they are on their way to the nearest settlement. There is only a 10% chance that any of the youngsters speak a broken dialect of a language known to the party. Even so, they are more curious about than apprehensive of the player character party. If they are traveling along the road, they invite the party to travel with them, taking them to the nearest settlement (which is their destination).

If the party menaces the shepherds or the livestock, the dogs move to defend them. The shepherds each have 2 hit points. The Dungeon Master should pick whatever livestock seems appropriate.

Herd dogs (2): AC 7; MV 15; HD 2+1; hp 10; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (bite); SZ M (5' long); ML average (8-10); Int semi- (3); AL NE; XP 65.

Overseers and Peasants

There are 4d10+10 peasants tilling fields, repairing buildings or roads, or engaged in some other form of labor. There is enough interest in whatever their task is on the part of the local lord that he or she has assigned overseers to see that the task is done properly and in a timely fashion. There is one overseer present for every 10 workers.

The workers do not approach the party and they seem very apprehensive if any of the party members approach them. They anxiously direct the heroes to their nearby overseers. The workers only speak the native language of the domain.

The Dungeon Master should roll a d6 to determine what the overseer is doing when the party arrives: **1-2.** Lounging in the shade; **3.** Sleeping in the shade; **4.** Inspecting a broken tool in the field as other workers stand by idly; **5.** Whipping a lazy worker; **6.** Lounging the shade with a sweetheart.

The overseers are friendly and helpful, so long as the party doesn't interfere with the workers. They angrily challenge the party over any interference and order one of the workers to fetch some law enforcers if the party doesn't stop their distractions. (Whatever militia or police force that exists in the domain attempts to take the party into custody 2d4 hours later, assuming the worker gets away.) All the overseers speak a broken version of a language known to the heroes. They can impart whatever information the Dungeon Master wants the party to know about the local region.

The workers are all 0-level NPCs with 1d4 hit points each. The overseers are 1st-level fighters with statistics that conform to those of Hazlan's enforcers. 80% of both workers and overseers are male.

Enforcers, human males and females (Mulan and Rashemi), F1, (2d20): AC 7 (studded leather); MV 12; HD 1; hp 9; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (short sword) or 1d2 (whip); SZ 5' to 6' 1"; ML steady (11-13); Int average (8-10); AL any N or E; XP 15.

Travelers

There are a variety of other travelers that may be encountered on the road. They are mostly 0-level, although some may be more interesting in nature. The Dungeon Master should roll 1d6 to determine exactly who (or what) the party meets.

1-2. A caravan of wealthy merchants and their servants traveling the opposite direction of the party. The merchants know a language spoken by the heroes and they can share whatever information the Dungeon Master wishes to impart. They are heading to the nearest city and invite the party to travel with them.

3-4. A group of 1d4+2 paka (*RAVENLOFT MONSTROUS Compendium III*) ask to join the party ("Safety in numbers. . .). They attempt to rob the party that night, although they do not try to kill them. If shown mercy, the paka spread the word to others of their kind that the party are not as evil as other humans. Future encounters the party has with paka will be more friendly, and perhaps the paka might even attempt to recruit the party to help with a problem they are faced by.

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5. A traveling entertainer in a brightly painted wagon is heading for the same destination as the party. He or she can provide information about Hazlan, as well as any other domain in the Core that the Dungeon Master wishes the party to have information about. (The Dungeon Master can turn to *Children of the Night: Werebeasts* for an excellent NPC who can fill this role—the cursed Professor Arcanus. The included scenario can also be used, as the Professor invites the party to attend his show once he has set up at his destination.)

6. The travelers are wolfweres moving about in their humanoid form. If the party already encountered the wolfweres above but didn't kill them, the creatures might now be on the run from werewolf stalkers. If the party slew the previous wolfweres, these creatures are looking for revenge. There are 1d4+3 wolfweres in this group.

NIGHTTIME ENCOUNTERS

2d10	Result
2-3	Werewolves
4-5	Wolves
6-8	Hag (Annis)
9-11	Alon the Rashemi Vampire
12-13	Ariela the Mulan Vampire
14-15	Necromancers and Zombies
16-17	Travelers
18-20	The Banshee and the Bandits

Werewolves

These creatures are on the trail of a party of with whom they have a rivalry. However, they are not above attacking other travelers they encounter.

When first met, the werewolves are in their human forms, appearing swarthy and dark-eyed. Their clothing is dusty and slightly ratty in appearance, lending them the appearance of individuals who been on the road for some time. They claim to be bounty hunters from Barovia, searching for a band of monstrous cutthroats; if the party encountered the wolfweres, the description given by the werewolves matches them exactly.

If the party knows nothing about the wolfweres or lies about having encountered them, there is a 65% chance the werewolves continue on their way without further harassing the party. The rest of the time, however, the werewolves merely go out of sight, change into their hybrid forms and circle around to attack the party.

If the party is displaying the symbol given them by the wolfweres, there is an 85% chance that the werewolves attack as described above. If attacked by the party first, the werewolves attempt to retreat, intending to ambush the party later. If the party pursues, however, they change to their hybrid forms and attack, fighting to

their deaths if necessary. (If the werewolves are allowed to flee, they ambush the party at some later time.)

Note: DMs with access to the *Children of the Night: Werebeasts* AD&D adventure anthology may wish to replace this encounter with the mini-adventure featuring Mother Fury and her lycanthropic followers. The adventure might cause the party to stray from the current plotlines of the DM's campaign, however.

Lycanthropes: Werewolves (1d4+2): AC 4; MV 18; HD 4+1; hp 25; THAC0 15; #AT1; Dmg 1d8 (long swords, human form) 2d4 (claws or bite attack, hybrid form); SA surprise; SD hit only by silver or +1 or better magical weapon; SZ M (5' 11"-6"); ML Steady (12); Int average (8-10); AL CE; XP 420.

Note: In the Demiplane of Dread, there is a 2% chance per point of damage inflicted by a lycanthrope's attack. The damage must be inflicted by the natural weapons of the lycanthrope; teeth, claws, or (in the human or demihuman aspect) unarmed attacks.

Wolves

These animals appear on a nearby ridge and start howling at the night sky. There are 2d4 of them.

If the party launches an attack on them, they will likely flee. However, there is a 20% chance that one of their number is actually a werewolf in his or her animal form. If a werewolf is present, the pack does not flee but instead responds to party hostility by merely appearing to flee. They stage an ambush somewhere nearby, attacking the party within 2d6 rounds following the initial contact. Use the werewolf stats presented under the "Werewolves" encounter, above.

Wolves (2d6): AC 7; MV 18; HD 3; hp 10; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4+1 (bite); SD +1 save vs. charm; SZ S (3'-4'); ML average (10); Int low (5-7); AL N; XP 120.

Hag (Annis)

The heroes hear the sound of a woman crying out in pain. If they go to investigate, they find a beautiful, rag-clad young woman at the bottom of a 20' deep pit; by all appearances, she has just fallen through the covering that hid it from sight. She claims her ankle is twisted and that she can't stand. She weeps hysterically and begs the heroes to help her.

The maiden in distress is actually an annis who has *changed self* into a less monstrous form. She continues to play the helpless maiden (giving a sob story of a brutal, misshapen beastman husband that forces her to forage for food even after dark if she does not return with any) until she has been pulled out of the pit and the majority of the party is fussing over her. . . at which point she reverts to her true form and focuses her round of attacks on any obvious mages, or the most powerful-looking warrior.

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The annis fights to the death if necessary, although she will attempt to cast *fog cloud* and flee the party should they prove to be too powerful for her to defeat.

Hag (Annis): AC 4; MV 18; HD 7+7; hp 57; THAC0 10 (includes +3 to-hit bonus for 18/00 Str); #AT3; Dmg 1d8+8/1d8+8 (claws)/2d4+1 (bite); SA surprise SD edged weapons cause 1 point less damage against an annis; SZ M (5'11"-6'); ML Champion (15); Int very (11-12); AL CE; XP 4,000

Alon the Rashemi Vampire

Alon is a stocky, Rashemi male in tattered clothing whose skin appears ashen gray. He is a hate-filled creature who delights in using his vampiric powers to terrorize and spread pain and suffering. Rashemi are a human subrace that are oppressed by the Mulan minority in their homeland of Hazlan. Although Alon accepted his place as a second-class citizen when he walked among the living, he has become obsessed with proving his superiority to all non-Rashemi Mulan. He delights in creating fledgling vampires and then sending them on excursions that are likely to get them destroyed or maimed. He particularly delights in torturing any traveling Mulans he might encounter.

When he has one or more vampire slaves, Alon himself has merely harasses travelers. He does this by sending waves of summoned animals at those who camp under open sky at night. (There are a number of peasants in the region who are secretly Alon's *charmed* human servitors; they inform him of travelers along the road.)

Alon does not attack the party unless a single of its members can be caught alone. However, during the swarming of the animals, he can be heard laughing maniacally somewhere in the distance. (Should he manage to corner a solitary character, like a sentry or a hero out for a late night stroll, he proclaims his superiority before killing him or her. He also plays with his victim, further underscoring his superiority in his mind. The truth, however, is that Alon is little more than a cowardly bully. . . and a somewhat dimwitted one at that. He only speaks or understands Thayvian.

This encounter occurs only once per night. If it is generated again, run the "Mulan Vampire" encounter below.

Alon, male fledgling vampire: AC 1; MV 12, fl in bat-form 18 (C), fl in gaseous form 9 (E); HD 8+3; hp 30; THAC0 9 (adjusted for Str bonus); #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+4 (Str bonus); SA level drain, charm ability (-2 to saving throw to resist); SD +1 or better weapon to hit, regenerates 3 hp/round, immune to sleep, charm, hold, poisons, paralysis, and cold- and electricity-based attacks; SZ M (5'7"); ML average (10); Int average (10); AL NE; XP 6,000.

Note: Alon has been a vampire for a little over a year, hence he has not yet developed all the powers enjoyed by older vampires.

Ariela the Mulan Vampire

This sparsely tattooed young Mulan woman is a vampire who is a thrall of the Rashemi vampire detailed in the previous encounter. Named Ariela, she was once a wizard at Hazlik's academy; she fell victim to Alon's unholy hunger several months ago. She is disgusted by what she has become, but is even more tormented by her servitude to the crude and entirely inferior beast that is Alon. Further, he is bent on humiliating her in every conceivable way to prove to himself that he isn't inferior to Mulans; rather, that the opposite is the case.

She approaches the party under the pretense of being a traveler who was separated from her party during a bandit attack. As she interacts with the party, she receives an Intelligence check. If the check fails, she follows the command she was given by Alon—which was to attack and destroy the first humans she encountered on her wanderings that night.

If the check is successful, Ariela manages to shake off Alon's domination for a few moments. She reveals her true nature to the player characters and begs them to destroy her before she can no longer resist her master's voice. She asks, however, that they do her two favors.

First, she begs that they kill her vampiric sire, a monster in the form of a man who first forced this terrible state upon her and is now sending her into the countryside to murder innocent travelers, all to prove his superiority to her, being that he is a Rashemi and she is a Mulan. She tells the party exactly where his lair is. (It is a nearby cave complex. It is guarded by traps, various lesser undead, and maybe a weak vampire or two.)

Second, Ariela asks the party to deliver a letter of apology to her master, Hazlik the Red Wizard. She gives the party a letter written in Thayvian on crumpled, bloodstained parchment. (It is just a brief letter, expressing her sorrow for not being able to complete her magical training under his firm guidance, or even able to complete the trip she took to gather rare spell components for him. She also says how sorry she is that she has failed him by not being able to fend off the fiend that turned her into one of the undead.)

Although Ariela wants to die, Alon's control over her reasserts itself as soon as she is attacked, which includes a player character trying to drive a stake through her heart. She fights until she is reduced to gaseous form, at which point she flees back to her coffin in Alon's lair. The party can then put her to final rest.

Alon's death can be as hard or as easy as the Dungeon Master chooses to make it.

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Ariela, female fledgling vampire: AC 1; MV 12, fl 18 (C) in bat-form, fl 9 (E) in gaseous form; HD 4+3; hp 30; THAC0 13 (adjusted for Str bonus); #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+4 (Str bonus); SA level drain, charm ability (-2 to saving throw to resist); SD +1 or better weapon to hit, regenerates 3 hp/round, immune to sleep, charm, hold, poisons, paralysis, and cold- and electricity-based attacks; SZ M (5'7"); ML Champion (16); Int exceptional (16); AL NE; XP 5,000.

Spell in memory: *magic missile*

Notes: Ariela has only been a vampire for a few weeks, hence she has not yet gained the full power of the standard version of these monsters.

Necromancers and Zombies

These spellcasters are either from Hazlan (1-4) or from Darkon (5-6). If they are from Hazlan, they are all Mulans. They are highly skilled necromancers and joined by 2d10 zombies in servant garb. The zombies are well preserved and cared for, and the party may not recognize them as undead immediately. (The Dungeon Master can call for Intelligence checks after a few minutes of speaking with the wizards.) A stench of decaying bodies hangs about the wizards and the zombies, however.

The necromancers are friendly and outgoing and invite the party to share their camp. They have a high opinion of the political leader of the domain they hail from, particularly if that leader is the domain lord.

If the party attacks these wizards, the zombies come to their defense. One in three zombies is under the effect of an *augment undead* spell (as found in *Domains of Dread*).

Necromancers, male and female humans, M5 (1d3):

AC 6 (armor spell); MV 12; HD 3; hp 7; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (dagger) or by spell; SA spells; SD spells; SZ 5'-6'1"; ML elite (14); Int 13; AL any E; XP 650.

Special Equipment: 1d6 vials of different acids, 1d6 pouches of misc. powders (1d200 gp value).

Spellbook (4/2/1): 1st—*armor**, *burning hands*, *chill touch*, *detect magic*, *detect undead*, *identify*, *jump**, *light*, *magic missile*, *read magic*, *unseen servant**; 2nd—*flaming sphere**, *locate object*, *spectral hand*, *whispering wind**; 3rd—*augment undead**.

* Indicates memorized spells.

** Indicates spell included in *Domains of Dread*.

Travelers

This group of travelers failed to reach their destination before nightfall. They are most likely camped by the side of road, although the Dungeon Master might choose to have them still moving, if it seems appropriate. (For example, if the heroes have camped, the NPCs may

approach them with the excuse that there is safety in numbers.) The Dungeon Master should roll 1d6 to determine exactly who (or what) the party meets.

1-2. An enforcer and 15 prisoners. The prisoners are all shackled together. The enforcer speaks only a few words of a language spoken by the party and is extremely paranoid. All the prisoners are 0-level Rashemi, and the enforcer is a Mulan with standard enforcer statistics. (If rolled more than once, treat as “no encounter.”)

3-4. A Mulan female wizard and a Rashemi male wizard are traveling to or from Ramulai in Hazlan whichever direction that the party is heading in. They are traveling in the same direction as the party. They are both 5th-level wizards who are interested in spells of darkness, light, and shadow. They prefer to do all their traveling at night.

The pair is deeply devoted to each other, sharing a love for each other, the night, and the dark magical arts. If the party threatens one, the other will come to his or rescue. Similarly, if one should die at the hands of the party, the other, if he or she survives, will devote their every waking moment to gaining revenge. (The pair keep their romance a secret because of Hazlan’s cultural mores.)

Although they have no interest in sharing the party’s camp site, they are willing to allow the heroes to join them on their journey to Ramulai. They can tell the party any information the Dungeon Master wishes to reveal about the domains of the southern Core, and they always speak in the most glowing of terms about their leaders of Hazlan and the people of their land.

5. A group of Vistani (a mysterious gypsy-like people who wander throughout the Ravenloft domains) are camped by the road. They will happily share their camp with the party and are even willing to perform song and dances and other entertainments provided the party is willing to pay. They can also reveal anything the Dungeon Master wishes the party to know about the Domains of Dread.

If the Dungeon Master wishes, one of the scenarios from the AD&D adventure anthology *Children of the Night: Vampires* can replace this encounter. The tragic tale of Alexi, a vibrant Vistani boy turned into a vampire might work nicely here. There is a risk that it might distract the characters from the overall thrust of the campaign, but the Dungeon Master can add a fortunetelling or other bit of character action that might help keep the focus. Also, the Dungeon Master might consider replacing Runold in the adventure with Alon, a Rashemi vampire detailed in one of the other encounters in this section. In such a case, the party would need to encounter Alon before they encounter Alexi.

6. The travelers are werewolves moving about in their humanoid form. These werewolves might be

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interested just in having a bit of dinner, and the party might look tasty.

The Banshee and the Bandits

This encounter pits the party against one of the most vicious groups of bandits roaming the Barren Lands of northern Hazlan. It starts with the party hearing gruff voices laughing and whooping somewhere off in the barren hills. Moments later, a winsome elf lass appears at the top of a hill, bare-foot and dressed in tattered clothing. She sways for a moment, then pitches forward and rolls down the hill toward the party. When the party investigates, they find that she is bleeding from many deep stab wounds, has been beaten severely and seems to be having a hard time breathing. “Help me,” she moans. “Don’t let them hurt me anymore.”

Before the party can take any other action—except maybe start an attempt to help the elf—a number of men appear on the ridge. The leader says he is Shayn the Swift, and orders the party to get away from his “toy.” He further adds that any elf wench in the Barrens is his to do with as he pleases. If the party doesn’t comply, he and his men attack them.

The heroes have one round to attempt to help the nameless elf while Shayn makes introductions. That, however, simply isn’t enough: She is dying both from her wounds and from poison in her system, put there by Shayn’s dagger of venom. With a final gasp and a weak spasm, she dies.

The party can fight Shayn and his men for two rounds. Then a spectral, glowing form rises from the dead elf; it resembles her, except the form is clad in glistening elven chain mail and carrying a long sword with elven runes carved into the blade. Her face is a grimace of pain and ghostly tears stream from her eyes, which burn with intense hatred. “Foul beasts,” the spirit hisses.

The elf has risen as a banshee, her soul trapped in the hatred she felt for her killers at her moment of death. The low-level bandits immediately flee in terror while the party members and Shayn must roll fear checks. Regardless of how the rolls turn out, the banshee cries, “You will never hurt anyone again!” And then she issues a death wail.

If any bandits survive, she hunts them down and slays them with her phantom sword. Shayn she leaves to the party, but if they have not finished him by the time she has killed all the surviving bandits, she attacks him as well.

If the party attacks the banshee, she retreats from battle. “I do not hold any ill will toward you,” she says, remaining out of melee range. She apologizes if any party members fell to her death wail, but says that she could not help it. She says that she can make things right

again, if the party gives her the chance. If the party persists in their attacks, the banshee goes wild and attacks them, weeping and crying that she doesn’t want to hurt them, but that the very beating of their hearts is tearing her to pieces.

If the party gives the banshee a moment, she gazes at the fallen bandits, a look of peace softening her features. “The hate inside me, the pain . . . it was too great,” she says. “I had to make them pay for what they did to me . . . the unspeakable things . . .” She grimaces and winces as though feeling a sudden pain, and her focus returns to the party. “My killers have most of my belongings, but I hid my most valuable treasures just before they captured me. Among the items I managed to hide is a steel rod shaped to look like intertwined branches. It is a powerful artifact that can raise the dead. One of your slain companions can be brought back from the dead each day, but only if they were men or women of good hearts. Quenesti Pah will not give her power to recall evil beings from beyond the Misty Veil.”

The elf introduces herself as Alrahannarasha (“but you can call me Hanna”). She promises to show the heroes where she hid the artifact if they make her two promises.

First, she wants them leave her body unburied, stating that she wishes all of Nature’s facets to take part in reclaiming it. Second, she wants them to leave a matched set of bracelets that she hid along with the artifact with her body. “They were gifts from my husband and I would like them to remain with me. They are all I have to remember him by at this point. You can keep all the rest of my valuables . . . the beasts that killed me already have them.”

If the survivors agrees to the banshee’s terms, she takes them to a small pile of rocks about a mile from where the combat occurred. Here, under a flat rock and a bit of dirt, is a matched set of delicate silver bracelets, along with the steel rod Hanna described. The bracelets are worth 160 gp each while the “artifact” is in fact a standard *rod of resurrection* with 24 charges. It will bring any character back from the dead that a priest using it chooses to resurrect as long as it has charges remaining. (The party will not be able to recover these items without Hanna’s assistance.)

Upon recovering the treasures offered by Hanna, the party will likely wish to search the slain bandits. Aside from their weapons and armor, each man carries 2d6 cp and 1d6 sp.

In addition, Shayn possesses a dagger of venom; a pouch with 4 pp, 6 gp, 9 sp, and 2 cp; and a small backpack containing a canteen of water, three days of dried fruit rations, a finely crafted belt that fits the slender waist of an elven woman with two sheathed daggers on it (the daggers are non-magical, but the belt has an ornate silver buckle worth 35 gp), a ring that appears to be made

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of freshly twisted twigs (a *+1 ring of protection*), a pouch containing two 50 gp gems, 21 pp, 13 gp, 9 sp, and 11 cp, and a sealed scroll case made from highly polished wood.

As the party searches the bandits, the banshee asks one more favor of them. She asks that they deliver the sealed wooden scroll case to Eleni of Toyalis. It is a message from Lord Mayor Mason of Har-Thelen to the other ruler and it was the elf's mission to deliver it. She says that she is certain Eleni will reward them if they complete her task. The elf does not know the nature of the message, only that it relates to Mason's fear that a particularly evil dwarf named Azrael might be plotting to murder him. (If the heroes break the seal, the letter is indeed a request from Mason for Eleni to convince Hazlik to send him a bunch of wizards to serve as his bodyguards.) If the party does not wish to deliver the message, the banshee does not take offense; she undertook the mission only to get out of Sithicus.

Once the party's search is of the bodies is complete, Hanna suddenly trembles and moans in pain. She looks at the heroes with a confused expression. "I thought it was just the presence of those vile men that was causing me pain," she muses. "But you, who are not evil, are making my soul ache just as much . . . even more, in fact. And the pain is growing worse with each moment."

If any of the player characters have extensive knowledge of undead, they can explain to the elf what she has become. She is saddened by this fact, but still believes her revenge against her abusers was worth it. She encourages the party to leave quickly because the pain is getting to the point where she won't be able to tolerate it for much longer.

Hanna does not wish to be brought back to life, if asked. "My beloved husband died last year and I have nothing left to live for," she says. She also states that she intends to remain with the body until it has decayed, protecting it from looters and other men who would defile it. She is willing to permit the party to move the body to a location that is isolated from where the living might easily find it, however.

Hanna permits a player character to perform funeral rites or otherwise bless her body if asked, but only after learning something about the priest's faith. She followed Quenesti Pah, a goddess of healing and fertility that is worshipped by a handful of elves in the domain of Sithicus. If the priest's god is of a similar nature, or at least not opposed to the values that a goddess of healing and fertility represents, she permits the blessing. Once the body has been blessed, the banshee's pain seems to ease. Moments later, she starts to fade from view. She thanks the priest for his blessing, but urges the party to please heed her requests regarding her body and bracelets. (If they do not, the banshee may reappear later in the campaign.)

Dungeon Masters should award XPs as if the party "defeats" Hanna if they resolve this confrontation through roleplaying rather than combat. The award may be reduced if they decide to steal her bracelets or bury her body against her wishes.

Banshee ("Hanna"): AC 0; MV 15; HD 7; hp 48; THAC0 13; #AT1; Dmg 1d8 (spectral long sword or touch); SA death wail; SD immune to sleep, charm, hold, and cold- and electricity-based attacks; SW dispel evil; MR 50%; SZ M (5'); ML Fearless (19); Int exceptional (15); AL CE (with swiftly fading NG tendencies); XP 4,000.

Note: Hanna is turned as a "special" undead. She takes 2d4 points of damage if holy water is splashed upon her.

Shayn the Swift, half-elf male, F7: AC 1 (chain mail and Dex bonus); MV 12; HD 5; hp 60; THAC0 14; #AT2; Dmg 1d8 (sabre) and 1d4+poison; SA poison; SD 30% resistance to sleep and charm spells; SZ M (5'-6'); ML Elite (14); Int high (13); AL CE; XP 1,400.

Special Equipment: Dagger of venom with 2 charges left.

Note: Shayn uses a two-handed fighting style similar to that of rangers and he has an unusually high Dexterity that offsets the two-handed fighting penalty.

Bandits human males, F3 (5, plus one additional per party member): AC 8 (leather armor); MV 12; HD 2; hp 15; THAC0 20; #AT1 or 2; Dmg 1d6 (short swords) or 1d6 (short bows); SZ M (5'-6'); ML average (8-10); Int average (8-10); AL NE; XP 65.

Note: Three of the bandits have bows and six arrows each. These men will try to hang back and fire arrows at the party. These archers are worth 120 experience points if defeated by the party.



GUNDAR

Sometimes They Come Back

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BIOGRAPHY

Gundar, former Duke of Gundarak, has never been known to be a subtle man—indeed, he is known by his former subjects as a cruel despot, a madman known to fly in an uncontrollable rage at the merest slight. Now freed from his domain, he is a terrible force, leaving a trail of bodies behind him as he and his band of brigands roam the Core with only one goal in mind: vengeance.

Former Darklord of Gundarak Gundar of Hunadora

13th-Level Eminent Nosferatu Vampire Fighter, Chaotic Evil

Armor Class	-1	Str	20
Movement	21	Dex	19
Level/Hit Dice	13/8+3	Con	18
Hit Points	67	Int	14
THACO	7 or 4	Wis	8
No. of Attacks	2 or 1	Cha	12
Damage/Attack	1d6+8 (claws) or by weapon +8		
Special Attacks	Fear gaze, Drain Constitution		
Special Defenses	Undead immunities, Only hit by +2 weapon or higher		
Magic Resistance	20%		

Appearance

Gundar is a large man, standing well over six feet tall. While he was once handsome, his face now resembles that of a beast, with heavy, bushy eyebrows over a craggy nose, and a black, unkempt beard.

His lips and tongue are dark red, as if coated in blood, and his face is set in a snarl. He never speaks if he can shout. But Gundar's most notable trait is his hands, which are large, coarse and callused, as Gundar revels in killing his enemies with his bare hands.

When he was still duke of Gundarak, Gundar dressed himself up in a uniform, with high boots, black pants, and a white-trimmed red jacket, an ornamental silver saber at his side. Now that he is roaming the Core, he has taken to wearing hide armor and a fur cloak, though he encourages his men to wear a red sash to acknowledge him as their leader. He carries no weapons, but he is far from defenseless.

The vampire seems to not care too greatly for personal hygiene or luxury—he rarely cleans off the blood of his victims, and has been known to wear the same, crimson-spattered clothes for days on end.

When Gundar goes into a frenzy, his appearance changes dramatically. His nails elongate, becoming vicious claws, his teeth grow into slavering fangs, and a red glow smolders in his eyes. In this state, he is terrifying to behold, and few are those who have survived his wrath when they met him in this state.

Background

Gundar was born on a distant world approximately 560 years ago, in the province of Hunadora. At that time, Hunadora had just been added to the rapidly growing empire of Otto III, who had crowned himself after disposing of the previous ruler.

Gundar grew up in an oppressive regime, where all he had fell to the state. As he saw his father and elder brother fell under the swords of Otto's men, and worse happen to his sister, his hatred towards the tyrant grew. At the age of thirteen he joined the resistance. Gundar's hatred for the enemy and his enormous strength propelled him in the ranks of the movement. His fights were always victorious, and none of his foes ever escaped alive.

After years of struggle, Gundar finally found a way into the count's bastion of evil. A servant had secretly provided a map and a way into the castle. Gundar hoped to sneak in with a few men and dispose of the tyrant.

Unfortunately, Gundar had not learned everything of his foe, and thus it came as a complete surprise when he discovered that his oppressor was no mere human, but a

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powerful nosferatu. The task that has seemed so easy proved futile—Otto, who had known of Gundar’s plan well in advance, disposed of his men with ease. He left Gundar for last. As the vampire fell upon him, Gundar thought he had met his doom—but it was not Otto’s intent to end the suffering there. Instead, Otto turned Gundar into a vampire, a minion to be witness to all his future evil plans. Gundar proved unable to resist the dark surge that came with the change, nor was he able to resist the will of his new master. He meekly followed the orders of Otto, to betray and crush the resistance to which he once belonged. Nor was he capable of stopping Otto’s rampage through the country. Gundar saw most of what was left of his own family destroyed.

Centuries passed. Otto reigned supreme. The few rebellious forces were crushed and destroyed by Gundar at Otto’s will. While he secretly craved to be free to roam the countryside, Gundar was unable to resist Otto’s commands. With each passing year, he felt his humanity slip. Gone was the rush of adrenaline in battle, the drinking and eating in reverie, the sweet caresses of the sun, and, even more, the tender touch of a lover. Gundar bemoaned mostly the loss of love, for in his life he had never had the opportunity for romance. Now, he hated those who had found peace and quiet, and he strove to destroy it whenever he had the chance, separating men from their families, and rushing them into battles in which they would be surely killed.

Finally, Otto’s tyranny engendered a war with a neighboring country, and all men were called to arms. The army of poorly-equipped farmers proved ineffective against the well-trained troops that strode in from the North, and even Gundar’s hardened troops could not slow the foe’s advance. Heavy criticism arose about how Gundar seemed to be stalling battles, and how he had made one strategic blunder after another. Some even openly accused him of failing on purpose—but Gundar was too far in the field to confront him with these allegations.

As Otto’s reign finally fell, Gundar was at the borderlands of Hunadora, withdrawing his troops from a small company of the Northern cavalry. He had been touring this land for years, secretly searching for the site that was to hold a magic stone known as the Hymn of Life. Legends told how the Hymn could restore a dead man to life, and Gundar had hoped for years that the stone could return to him the vigor of true life.

As he led his men through the woods, retreating from the enemy, the troops stumbled upon an hitherto uncharted open spot. In the middle of the spot stood a large, round pillar of what looked like marble. As Gundar stepped closer, he heard a faint hum emanating from the stone, as if it was vibrating. Something stirred in Gundar’s chest. This must be the stone he had been looking for. Ignoring the pleas of his soldiers, who feared

discovery by the enemy, Gundar commanded the battalion’s mage to conduct research.

After casting a few spells the mage concluded that the pillar was a conduit for powerful magic, most likely of an extra-planar origin. Of course, such a meager test could not possibly be enough to unravel the power of the stone, but Gundar quickly grew impatient and demanded the mage activate the stone’s magic. The wizard hesitated, so Gundar lashed out at him. His men looked on in horror as the bloodied mage set on to cast a spell that would activate the stone.

Gundar stepped closer, as he did not wish to miss out on the power that would restore his humanity.

As an unnatural silence befell the group, Gundar realized he had made a mistake. He tried to step back, but found he could not. A darkness gathered around the pillar. His men’s faces contorted in screams of terror, but no sound could be heard. Then the darkness expanded, washing over Gundar and his men, and as it washed over him, Gundar was filled with a tide of emotions. Lust, hate, and every dark desire he ever had rose in his chest, overpowering his mind with a cacophony of sensations. He screamed for ages, clutching his head until he collapsed, surrendering to oblivion.

When Gundar opened his eyes again, the flow of emotions had stopped. The pillar was gone, and he found himself in unknown territory. Almost two-thirds of his men, including the mage, were missing. The pillar, it seemed, had opened a temporary gate into another world, and had transported Gundar and his men there. The effect the Hymn should have had seemed not to have come to fruition. Gundar knew he was still undead. While he sensed a strange vibration running through his body, he dismissed this as an after effect of the strange, extra-planar magic.

Gathering his senses, Gundar led his company across the land, sacking the first settlement they encountered: Krezk, still a small village in those days. From the survivors of his attack, Gundar learned that he had entered a country called Barovia, ruled by a Count Strahd von Zarovich. This Count Von Zarovich soon responded to Gundar’s pillaging of Krezk, as a horde of Strahd zombies befell the squad when they left the village. Gundar had fought zombies before, but these creatures proved more formidable than he had expected. Dispatching the lot only after losing a third of his men, Gundar felt no desire to meet their master. Instead, he retreated into the hills, where he hoped he could hold out till he could learn more about his foe. At every turn, however, the group was met with more monsters: skeletons, dire wolves, and vampiric minions.

When only a few of Gundar’s men remained, Strahd himself appeared, confronting the vampire warrior and demanding he lay down his arms. Less stubborn men might have done so, but Gundar had no desire to again

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fall under the yoke of another vampire. Whether it was fear or anger than inspired him is unknown, but a fury more powerful than he had ever experienced claimed him. With a vampire's unnatural speed, Gundar charged Strahd. While the count had expected some resistance, he had not foreseen this bold attack. Gundar cannoned into the vampire, knocking him back, and for one moment Strahd felt uncertain. As he recovered from the first assault, however, Strahd found Gundar rushing away, towards the Misty border. Diving forward, Gundar hoped to find cover, but as he pressed on, the Mists parted, revealing new terrain. Only when he was sure that Strahd was not following did Gundar and his few surviving men survey the area.

They discovered a whole new land, tailored to their liking. Gundar assumed control, taking up camp in a decrepit castle that strangely resembled the old castle of Otto. He named the castle Hunadora, after the land of his birth, and proclaimed himself Duke of Gundarak. It was 593 on the Barovian calendar.

Duke Gundar ruled for over a hundred years, enforcing a cruel regime. While he donned the uniform and garb of a nobleman, the folk soon came to know him as a ravaging madman. All the atrocities committed by Otto were nothing compared to the harsh tyranny that befell the people of Gundarak.

As his reign continued, Gundar felt his power grow. He found that he had reclaimed some aspects of the life that had been denied him—to an extent. The magic of the Hymn of Life seemed to have changed something in his inner being, and all the emotions he once craved now welled up to the surface. He rediscovered both anger and fear, feelings long since lost to him. He was also plagued by hunger and thirst which mundane food and water could not slake, instead only fanning his craving for blood.

He rediscovered his lust for women, and fathered several children with the slaves that were brought to his castle to feed on. One daughter and one son were born from a particular favorite slave, though it is possible more children were begotten by other women. Gundar did not initially pay them much attention. Sadly, the vampiric blood in the children's veins slowly drove them insane. Medraut, the boy, killed his sister, Gewenna, over a minor dispute. The boy developed into a talented but mentally unstable sorcerer. Gundar and Medraut despised each other for decades. The duke utilized the sorcerous power Medraut could wield, but feared him for that same reason. Gundar went so far to hire assassins to dispose of his mad son, but none succeeded in their task. When the unnatural child was finally killed in a clash with Lord Soth, a death knight, it came as a relief to Gundar.

The cost of Gundar's revived emotions was not directly apparent, although Gundar noticed that truly pleasant feelings, such as love, never came to the surface. Gundar discovered the true price only several decades

later, when he found that, unlike all other vampires, he was aging—slowly, one year for every ten. This scared Gundar; the thought that he would grow older and possibly even die—the true death—was hard to bear. In order to slow the process, he started to recruit the more subtle and intelligent minds from his domain's populace, people whose knowledge of the mind and body could theoretically stop the slow but unstoppable decaying of his body.

One such man was Daclaud Heinfroth, a doctor studying diseases of the mind. One of Heinfroth's dark experiments on one of Gundar's brides had accidentally turned him into an unusual type of vampire, one that fed on spinal fluids. The doctor, who adopted the alias of "Dr. Dominiani" after his transformation, was far more intelligent and cunning than Gundar, and easily broke away from the control the weak-willed vampire lord tried to impose on his 'subject.' He worked to gain Gundar's confidence, while at the same time conspiring to destroy him and take over the reign of Gundarak.

In 736 BC, Heinfroth succeeded in his plan—a party of heroes infiltrated Castle Hunadora to slay Gundar. Not only was the vampire lord aware of the heroes' approach, he had lured them to his castle to repay them for foiling a recent attempt to usurp control of Kartakass. In his mind, Gundar arranged an intricate trap. Working with Heinfroth, Gundar had planned to trick his foes into thinking him vulnerable. The heroes would be coaxed to use sunlight to trap the lord—and Gundar would let them, confident that his minion Heinfroth would set him free at the last moment to vent his wrath. Unfortunately, Gundar overestimated the control he held over the most vital link in his plan: Heinfroth. When the confrontation with the heroes came, Heinfroth declined to close the curtains that had been opened to trap the duke, and Gundar, paralyzed by the sun's rays, was unable to defend himself. A stake was driven through his heart, and in moments his flesh decayed into a skeletal husk. Heinfroth then slew the heroes himself, discarding their bodies, along with that of his master, in the deepest levels of the castle, the stake still lodged in the vampire's ribs. Heinfroth found himself the unexpected darklord of Gundarak, and became its apathetic, unspoken ruler for the next four years.

Heinfroth's rule ended with the Grand Conjunction in 740. The domain collapsed, and Barovian soldiers quickly marched in to claim half of the fallen duke's land—including the lands surrounding Heinfroth's own asylum. Heinfroth fled his keep, only to be promptly swallowed by the Mists, and was granted his own domain.

In the year 748, Invidian rebels against the evil Dukkar, Malocchio Aderre, discovered the skeleton of Gundar in the dungeons of Castle Hunadora. They sold the skeleton to the owner of a traveling road show. The skeleton was one of the top attractions is the show for

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years—until a pair of skeptical onlookers removed the stake from the ribcage. Gundar immediately revived, killed the couple, and fled the scene.

Current Sketch

Gundar now roams the lands of the Core, searching for Daclaud Heinfroth, with a group of the worst and vilest brigands he could find. He still ages, but he has currently postponed finding a “cure” until he has had his revenge on the vampire that betrayed him.

Part of Gundar would like to reclaim the land he once ruled from the dual grasp of Strahd and Malocchio, but fear of being imprisoned again keeps him from actively participating in the rebellion against the Dukkar. He has therefore not dared to return to his castle, Hunadora.

Instead, he has moved his brigand troupe to the former estate of Dr. Dominiani. Here, he hopes to find information on the doctor’s whereabouts. He has thus far been unsuccessful, though it is likely that it will not take long before he discovers the truth. Meanwhile, he and his band make short forays into the surrounding lands of Barovia, Sithicus, and Kartakass. Most of his crimes are now blamed on the Gundarakite rebels.

Gundar is willing to cooperate with anyone that can help him obtain his revenge on Dominiani. He has already drawn the attention of the demon Inajira, a lifelong archenemy of Strahd. The fiend is currently contemplating whether an alliance with Gundar may be beneficial. Gundar himself has already tried to gain support from Harkon Lukas, who also suffered under Dominiani’s double-cross, but the bard’s repulsion for vampires has caused the negotiations to fail.

Personality

Currently Gundar is mostly driven by his rage—he is a rampant berserker seeking vengeance. All who oppose him in his quest to see Heinfroth destroyed will perish.

On the other hand, Gundar is immensely afraid that he will eventually die. For a creature that would normally live forever, it is unbearable to know that he is aging. It may be possible for heroes to strike up a bargain with Gundar, and even to come out on top, if they can find the solution to Gundar’s immortality.

Those who deal with Gundar should beware; the vampire puts no trust in others. He expects betrayal at every opportunity, and is known to plant none-too-subtle traps to expose disloyal members of his brigand band.

Combat

Gundar has all the abilities of a Nosferatu vampire. He is also a very skilled warrior. It can be assumed that he is proficient in most melee weapons, including modern blades such as the saber. He rarely uses melee weapons,

however, as he prefers to use his hands in combat, using his great strength and Constitution drain to its full potential. His grip is immensely strong. If both his attacks hit the same foe in a round of combat, he has locked on to his victim. Every round thereafter, he does automatic damage, and can automatically drain 1 point of Constitution per round with his bite. A bend bars roll is required to break free from his grasp.

In the rare case where he might employ a weapon, Gundar adds his Strength bonus to the weapon’s damage (+8).

Gundar is an eminent vampire, much older than Strahd. He does not have the count’s strong will, but he does have some other benefits that come from his long life span. Sunlight does not hurt or kill him; however, it does cause him such pain that it effectively paralyzes him. When hit by the rays of the sun, Gundar is unable to move or defend himself (if he succeeds at a save vs. paralyzation he can move for one round before being paralyzed). At least 50% of his body has to be exposed to sunlight to have this effect. The paralysis leaves the instant less than 50% of his body is in the sun’s rays.

Gundar regenerates 4 hit points per round, and can only be hit by spells or weapons of +2 or higher enchantment. He can *charm* people with his gaze, like all nosferatu, but he does not enforce any penalties on saving throws according to his age. He does, however, have the ability to *cause fear* at will in any who look into his eyes. Those who do so must make a fear check or suffer its effects. Gundar is turned as a normal vampire, but with a +3 penalty applied to the die roll.

Finally, Gundar can enter a berserker frenzy if he wishes. When in this frenzy, he will never retreat from battle. He also gains a +2 bonus to all attack, damage, and saving throw rolls, and cannot be turned, though he is still vulnerable to sunlight.

Gundar can be killed, but he cannot be destroyed until his remains are buried in the soil of what was once Gundarak. In all other cases, it will be possible for his minions to revive him.



NATURE'S SORROW

A Druid Most Unnatural

by Mark "Mortavius" Graydon

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BIOGRAPHY

Destiny is unavoidable, some say. Perhaps this is the case. Who knows? Still, everywhere in the dark lands of the Demiplane of Dread, there are those who would defy destiny, who would go against everything to do what they see as right.

Some are the infamous darklords, those like the late Lord Azalin of Darkon or Count Strahd von Zarovich of Barovia. Both have sought to push the limits, to escape the prisons that they themselves have forged, refusing to accept their destiny. Still, not all who refuse to accept destiny are the Darklords. There are some that are shrouded in so much mystery and darkness that none can find them; and those who do soon wish they hadn't.

Background

The young man known as Meltos was born in the land of Tepest, in the city of Kellee, in the year 695. He grew up normally, but found that he always had a fascination with nature. His best friend as a child was another boy named Leobe, and as children they would wander the woods around Kellee, but never very far for fear of the "wee beasties."

Meltos was a handsome child, both in physical beauty and natural charisma. He was also a quiet lad, not given to the temper tantrums that frequently assaulted other children his age. Leobe, on the other hand, seemed to take Meltos' share of anger, as the boy was always defiant and boisterous. Despite these differences, their natural love of the woods brought them together in a bond that no one could break.

As they grew to manhood, their friendship deepened. Knowing the woods better than anyone around them, they started to travel further and further into the dark canopy of trees. Not a few times did they run into the wee beasties, but they were always triumphant in these encounters, because of Leobe's skill with his grandfather's long sword and Meltos' skill with a stout quarterstaff that he had carved himself. Leobe's enmity

towards goblins began at this time; the burning hatred of those creatures that sprang from these first encounters would last him through the rest of his life.

Meltos, on the other hand, was still true to his nature, and fought with the quiet determination that had become so familiar to Leobe over the years. It astounded the young huntsman one day when Meltos was injured by a goblin's arrow but did not cry out or even let on that he was hurt until the enemy was routed.

But as is the way of all things, the two friends grew apart. Then Meltos met Gorion. Gorion was a tall, quiet man, and Meltos soon found that he had a lot in common with him. Then, after a few weeks, Gorion confided in Meltos, telling him of the Caretakers. Meltos finally realized what he had been striving for all his life, and suddenly felt complete. He fairly begged Gorion to allow him to join, and the older man obliged.

Meltos' first Attunement took place a year later, in a deep forest in northeastern Tepest. And this is where Meltos' life turned again.

Upon the completion of the Attunement ritual, Meltos felt the rush of energy from the land of Tepest engulf him, filling him with a lust for power that never resided there before. After this ritual, Meltos changed. He became much more confident, sure, and active. His passive outlook on life gone, Meltos charged off, on his way to attune to more lands and spread his base of power. While he was gone however, the Hags of Tepest routed the Caretakers of Tepest and destroyed them to the last.

When Meltos returned to the land of his birth, he found his former headquarters deserted. The signs of a struggle were evident, and when he found a skeletal arm lying forgotten on the floor, he instinctively knew that the Hags were responsible for this horrid atrocity. A burning anger swelled within his breast, and Meltos immediately headed for the village of Kellee.

Finding his old friend Leobe was easy, as Leobe had become something of a hermit, living on the outskirts of the village. Leobe was very surprised to see Meltos, for when Meltos had disappeared to join the Caretakers, everyone soon came to believe that he had been killed in one of his forays into the woods.

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As happy as Leobe was to see Meltos, he still refused to storm into the woods that night in an effort to find the hidden Hags of Tepest and destroy them. Leobe dismissed the idea as foolish, and began to fear for his friend's sanity when he would not let the idea go. But before Leobe could stop him, the lad turned and fled out of the cottage into the night.

Searching through the wilderness that night, Meltos eventually came upon a small cottage alone in the woods. He crept up to it cautiously, but upon opening the door found no one at home.

But oh, how the place reeked! There was old blood splattered on the walls, and the large table in the center of the main room left little doubt as to what it had been used for. On a nearby table there lay some blood-splattered papers. Picking these up, he spied that they were notes written by someone calling himself "Phantom's Bane," and they concerned the process of becoming a lich. Stowing these papers in a pouch on his belt, Meltos turned to leave and saw a sight that would inspire his nightmares for years to come.

Before him in the doorway were three old hags, covered in warts, wrinkles, and open sores. One had teeth too large for her mouth, and drool constantly dripped down her black chin. Another had sickly green skin and stared at him with bright orange eyes and a surprised smile. And the final one was small and petite, with limp hair and bulging fish-like eyes that looked at him with what could only be described as hunger! Hanging from the clutches of one of the Hags was a small girl, perhaps no older than ten years. Mercifully, she was unconscious, and Meltos hoped that she would stay that way till her death . . . but he found the thought unlikely.

Frantically looking about, Meltos spied a boarded-up window and leapt for it, heedless of the cries of the women or the wooden boards in his way. Smashing through the obstacle and tumbling out into the forest, Meltos ran faster than he had before, but still had the presence of mind to hide his tracks using an ability taught to him by Gorion himself. As soon as he was able, Meltos fled Tepest for the land of Darkon.

Arriving in Darkon, Meltos found another branch of Caretakers, this group residing in the foothills of the Mountains of Misery. They took him in, and soon Meltos again began to advance within the hierarchy of the Caretakers. But Meltos' nights were plagued with dreams of the Hags and the broken bodies of his former comrades. Still, he kept working, traveling and attuning himself to other lands.

By the time Meltos turned fifty years old, he was ready to ascend to Archdruid status. But there was a problem. Meltos needed three Caretakers of Druid status to support him, and in his time abroad, Meltos had made enemies within the Caretakers. While no one could argue with his zealous desire to protect nature, they did not all

approve of his militant and sometimes brash methods. Thus, when Meltos petitioned others to swear fealty to him, he could only find one who would do so, and even then, reluctantly. This was a young man named Jonathan who had been in the order for long enough to make Druid status.

This shortfall worried Meltos, for he was getting on in years and knew that he had to make his ascension quickly. Otherwise the ravages of time would catch up with him, and he would wither away. Again, Meltos petitioned the order to provide three Druids to follow him, and again he was denied. This time no one stepped forward to support him. In a rage, Meltos forsook the order and swore to leave it to protect nature on his own.

As he was packing up his things, Meltos came upon some papers that he had completely forgotten about. They were the treatise on lichdom penned by the being known as Phantom's Bane. Sitting down and reading the papers once more, Meltos found an alternative to his quest to become an Archdruid and thus escape the ravages of time. And here too, was a way for him to defeat the three hags which had destroyed his original clan of Caretakers.

It did not matter to Meltos that the undead were unnatural, he was only going to become one for a short time, do what he had to do, and then go to his final rest. At least, this is what he told himself.

Meltos realized that a solstice was nearing. If he hurried, he could perform the ceremony to lichdom and the ritual of Attunement on the same night! Resolving to fulfill this plan, he hurried about collecting various herbs, deadly venom, and worst of all, blood. With each victim of his depredations, Meltos sank deeper and deeper into evil and darkness.

After studying and collecting the various ingredients listed in the treatise, Meltos was ready, but for one last requirement: the heart of a sentient creature. Meltos could only think of one person who would even speak with him after his leaving the Caretakers, and that was Jonathan, the one man who had tentatively stood with him on his petition for Archdruid status. Meltos' mind formed a horrific plan.

Luring Jonathan out into the forest during the solstice, Meltos slew the young man with the sickle he had used since he had entered the order, forever staining the dark blade. Then, defiling the instrument again, he cut Jonathan's still-warm heart from his chest. Looking up at the sky, Meltos began to perform the ceremony of lichdom and the ceremony of Attunement in a horrific combination of corruption. At the ritual's conclusion, Meltos drank the Potion of Transformation, and his world went dark.

Waking up later, Meltos realized that the rite had worked! He had become a powerful being, capable of delivering justice to the hags! It did not worry him that

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he now had skin like dead bark, flaking away whenever he moved suddenly, or that a stench of rotting vegetation followed him wherever he went. His sole consideration was revenge.

But when Meltos made his way to the border, he found that he could not cross into Tepest! The rituals he had performed had bound him to Darkon too strongly for him to leave it, even with his powers of a Caretaker! The woods echoed with his screams that night, as he vented his rage to the skies.

When his pent-up anger finally spent itself, he resigned himself to his fate. Discarding his name and all trappings of his former life, Meltos has now claimed a portion of the Forest of Shadows and jealously guards it from those who would enter his self-claimed land. He has often had to defend himself from lycanthropes sent by Galf Kloggin, but he has had no trouble doing so. The villages around the region now whisper of a new threat, one calling itself only . . . Nature's Sorrow.

Nature's Sorrow

13th-level Lich Caretaker, Neutral Evil

Armor Class	0	Str	14
Movement	6	Dex	11
Level/Hit Dice	13	Con	13
Hit Points	53	Int	16
THAC0	7	Wis	16
No. of Attacks	1	Cha	15
Damage/Attack	1d10 (touch) or 1d6 (staff) or 1d4+1 (sickle)		
Special Attacks	Rot, spells		
Special Defenses	Spells, only hit by +1 weapons or higher		
Special Vulnerabilities	Fire		
Magic Resistance	Nil		
XP Value	12,000		

Nature's Sorrow is horrible to look upon. He has a humanoid form, but his skin appears to be dead, flaking bark, and where hair should be white roots hang from a bald skull. Green fire lights his eyes, and a stench of rot hangs in the air around him. He is clothed in a tattered green robe.

Combat

Nature's Sorrow is a deadly opponent for those not prepared for him. His previous ordeals have bonded him with the land in a way that he could never have conceived; he *is* part of the land in an undead form. He has all the abilities of a Caretaker of his level, except that he cannot Shape Change or cross out of Darkon, and he no longer has a +2 bonus to saving throws vs. fire (but

electricity still applies). Undeath renders him immune to *charm* and any other mind-affecting spells.

Unlike the paralyzing touch of a normal lich, the touch of Nature's Sorrow causes an interesting form of rot. This rot can only affect living or once-living things, and eventually consumes all of whatever it afflicts. Non-living objects must succeed at a saving throw vs. magical fire every twelve hours or they are affected by the rot. Once two saving throws are failed, the item is destroyed. Living victims take longer to decay however, and if they make a saving throw vs. poison they are not affected at all. If the saving throw is failed however, the Rot sets in and the victim suffers 2d4 points of damage every hour from aches, bursting boils, opening sores, and stiffening of the joints. A *cure disease* spell will remove this blight from any afflicted target, whether living or not. Nature's Sorrow may opt to enchant his quarterstaff or sickle with spells and attack with them instead.

Nature's Sorrow retains all the spellcasting abilities he had before his transformation, and indeed, he still worships and protects nature. However, he sees no place for humans or the like in his view of nature, and exterminates them immediately. Because of his undead form, Nature's Sorrow has found that he major access to the sphere of Necromancy in addition to the standard spheres available to a normal Caretaker.

Nature's Sorrow can only be harmed by magical weapons of +1 or better enchantment. If the weapon in question is of a natural origin (made of wood or other organic material) then he only suffers half damage. On the other hand, if the weapon is one allowed to Caretakers (club, sickle, dart, spear, dagger, sling, scimitar, or quarterstaff) he suffers double normal damage, providing the weapons carries enough enchanted to harm him at all. If the weapon is not so enchanted, then it merely causes 1 point of damage with each successful attack.

Nature's Sorrow has another weakness: the ultimate cleanser, fire. He suffers a -2 penalty to any saving throws vs. fire-based attacks and suffers an extra 2 points of damage per die. For this reason, he usually focuses on killing flame-wielding opponents in preference to any others.

If reduced to 0 hp, Nature's Sorrow is forced into a spirit form, and will flee to the nearest tree while his former body quickly rots and crumbles to fetid, worm-infested earth (within two rounds). He can only flee to a tree within thirty feet of his body, and it must be at least six feet tall. In addition, Nature's Sorrow cannot take control of any tree that has been set aflame. If no viable tree exists within range, he is permanently destroyed as his soul dissipates, consumed by the earth. Thus, his foes would do well to set the forest around them ablaze if they wish the lich permanently dead. But if such a tree does exist within range, then his spirit inhabits it, and the tree dies within a day. Note that once Nature's Sorrow has

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taken possession of a tree, it gains his immunities and becomes temporarily immune to fire until the lich becomes active (in one day). After this day, Nature's Sorrow gains the ability to move, and his statistics are identical to that of an undead treant (*RAVENLOFT Monstrous Compendium I & II*). This phase lasts one week, after which his body has changed enough to resemble his shell of old and his statistics change to match those above.

In addition to his powers already listed, Nature's Sorrow has one other ability, resembling that of a normal treant. He can animate nearby trees (within thirty feet) to help him. Such a tree has statistics that resemble a normal evil treant, with 9 Hit Dice. He can only animate two trees in this way at a time, and each tree takes one round to uproot itself and move out. This process is taxing, so Nature's Sorrow only uses it when necessary.

Nature's Sorrow cannot control undead in the normal sense, but he can control any undead created from plant creatures or those killed by plants. If the undead falls into this category he can control them normally, as laid out in *Van Richten's Guide to the Lich*. If this accessory is not available, assume that Nature's Sorrow can control undead as a 13th-level cleric.

The lich's favorite spells are given below, but they may be changed if the need arises. He has major access to the spheres of All, Animal, Elemental, Healing, Necromantic, Plant, Time, Wards, and Weather. He has minor access to the spheres of Divination and Travelers. Nature's Sorrow never casts spells that involve fire other than to extinguish it.

Preferred Spells (6/6/6/4/2/2): *cause light wounds, curse, entangle, obscurement, putrefy food & drink, shillelagh; cause moderate wounds, charm person or mammal, chill metal, dust devil, warp wood, trip; call lightning, cause disease, dispel magic, protection from fire, spike growth, summon insects; cause serious wounds, fire purge, giant insect, poison; insect plague, slay living; age creature, wall of thorns*

Note: Some spells have been drawn from the *Players Handbook*, *Tome of Magic*, and *Player's Option: Spells & Magic*. If one or more of these sources are not available, substitute appropriate spells as you see fit.



CARNIVAL: THE BALLYHOO

MORE ACTS TO FILL YOUR TEN-IN-ONE

by John W. Mangrum
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A clown is funny in the circus ring, but what would be the normal reaction to opening a door at midnight and finding the same clown, standing there in the moonlight?

—Lon Chaney Sr.

INTRODUCTION

Carnival draws inspiration from over a century of sideshows and midways, both real and fictional. Many of its acts are dark echoes of the performers who worked under the true masters of the carnival craft: P. T. Barnum, Madame Tetrallini, Mr. Dark, and Dr. Lao. With such a rich tradition to draw from, it was inevitable that the *Carnival* accessory would never be able to hold all the exotic acts that lurked within its gaudy ring of wagons. As a sample for those who don't have *Carnival*, and as an extra gift for those who do, we present four more denizens of Isolde's Carnival. We hope you enjoy our acts; there may well be more Troupers still waiting in the wings . . .

Carnival Lingo Quick Reference

The speech of the Carnival's performers is littered with slang terms, used quite knowingly to alienate outsiders. The *Carnival* accessory offers a full glossary of Carny lingo, but these selections will see you through for now.

Ballyhoo: Excitement, ado. A free show offered to entice the Georges into visiting Carnival.

George: Rube, sucker, outsider. Visitors to the Carnival.

Ten-in-One: The Carnival tradition of presenting ten acts as a single show.

Trouper: A performer at the Carnival.

The farmer stood staring dully at the strange handbill nailed to the tree at the edge of his farm. It was covered not in words, but in strange swirls of ink. The moment his gaze fell on those swirls, they had drawn in his mind like a whirlpool. Strange patterns had revealed themselves within the swirls; images that became clearer with each minute, even as the farmer sank deeper into his trance.

Only gradually did he become aware of a hand snapping its fingers mere inches from his face. His mind suddenly clear, the farmer started back, spinning to face this unwelcome stranger. His jaw dropped.

The hand belonged to a tall, smirking man idly twirling a thin cane behind his back. The man's attire gave him the look of an undertaker—one who'd done very well for himself, in fact. But what dropped the farmer's jaw was that which lay beyond the smirking man. Strange and colorful figures hurried this way and that among a vast ring of wagons and tents. It was some sort of traveling festival, but . . . just how long had he been entranced by that unnatural handbill?

"Hello, George" said the stranger, offering a cold smile. "Are you the owner of this land? We'd like to plant stakes here for a few days, if we may. I do hope we can come to an arrangement."

The farmer frowned, still uncomprehending. "My name's not George. I don't think you should. . ."

The smirking man cut the farmer off before he could finish his refusal. "We are the Carnival, my good man. We enter, we entertain, we exit. No harm done to you or yours." The farmer's frown refused to waver. The smirking man threw a welcoming arm around his shoulder, taking the farmer into his confidence. "Look here George. You can call me Tindal, by the by. I understand your unease. I comprehend your concerns! But I'll make you a deal. What do you say to a bit of ballyhoo? I'll show you a few of our exotic entertainers, free of charge, of course, and then you can decide upon the payment you'd prefer for our presence. Step right up

...

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What wonderment shall I reveal to you first, George? Ah! What better choice than to offer two acts in one? Indeed, that's what we call them:

The Two-is-One

George, I'd like to introduce you to Philip and Allan. Their stage names are The Half-Boy and the Human Torso, respectively, but it's when combined that they truly shine, both onstage and off. Your eyes do not lie; Philip has feet but no legs, while Allan has hands but no arms. Apart, each is half a man, but perch the former on the shoulders of the latter, and they're more than a match for any mob!

These two gents are survivors of the Puppet Show, but I don't imagine you'd know what that is. Hmmm, I appear to be correct. Have you heard of the Carnival l'Morai? No? Alas, for they are one and the same. Sadly, the tale of the Puppet Show is long and sad, best saved for another tour—preferably one you've paid for. For now, just know that in that dread domain, innocents were sent to the Carnival l'Morai as a form of exile, punishment for nonexistent crimes. There, their bodies were cruelly transformed in ways intended to echo their supposed failings, and they were also robbed of the memories of their former lives, leaving them forever ignorant of their offenses.

Allan and Philip may never know why they were sent to the Puppet Show, but once there they found each other and struck up a natural partnership.

In case I forget to point it out to you later, George, you can tell the original Troupers of the Carnival l'Morai by a small red tattoo of a rearing horse on the back of their head; that's how the lord of the Puppet Show branded his slaves, the vicious swine. These days, of course, such a tattoo is an emblem worthy of respect.

I am told that back in l'Morai, Allan and Philip's imposed deformities turned any number of life's simple tasks into laborious chores. Not so anymore. In the decade they've traveled with the new Carnival under Isolde, both men have truly come into their own. Philip can run on his hands nearly as fast as you or I can sprint, and Allan's dexterous toes have turned him into a more talented painter than half the artists in Port-a-Lucine! In fact, he and the Illuminated Man paint most of our canvas banners! Hmmm? Oh, fear not, I'll introduce you to the Illuminated Man on some other night.

Combined, the Two-is-One truly astounds! Over the last few years, they've somehow talked Isolde into teaching them swordplay; while Philip wields his flashing saber, Allan confounds their opponent with his fancy footwork! If you're lucky, you might catch the sight of Two-is-One and Isolde's occasional sparring matches. It's a daring display of dancing steel, and I only wish I could talk Isolde into performing for the paying Georges.

It is all for show, after all; I rather get the feeling that if Isolde wanted to, she could mince the pair of them in twin heartbeats. Hmmm? Who is Isolde? Ah. Isolde is the Mistress of our Carnival; our guardian angel, if I may wax poetic. Best to put her out of your mind, George; she's not part of the tour.

The Two-is-One

Allan is an insightful man with natural artistic talents. His comrade Philip is dynamic and witty, always thirsting for adventure. When working as a team (with Philip riding atop Allan's shoulders), these two men can coordinate their efforts to great mutual benefit. In practice, Two-is-One can make two attempts at most die rolls; when rolling for initiative, ability score checks, or saving throws against physical attacks, roll two dice (one for each partner in Two-is-One) and use the better result. Only roll once for attack and damage rolls, however; wielding the blade falls to Allan alone.

In similar fashion, attacks which cause blindness hinder Two-in-One's abilities only if both men are affected; if only Allan or Philip is bereft of sight, the other can verbally direct his partner with such speed and acuity that they do not suffer the standard -4 penalty to attack rolls.

Philip & Allan, human males, F4: AC 10/9; MV 9/12; hp 23/26; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 (saber); SZ S/M; ML elite (13); Str 15/13, Dex 7/16, Con 13/14, Int 12/11, Wis 10/12, Cha 12/13 (6/6); AL CG

Notes: Where they differ between the two men, scores before the slash represent Philip; those after represent Allan. Charisma scores in parentheses represent their Charisma as seen by outsiders, as opposed to fellow Troupers.

The full tale of the Carnival l'Morai can be found in the novel *Carnival of Fear*. The *Carnival* accessory also provides an overview of the salient events.

Now George, prepare yourself as we start to enter the realm of the truly bizarre. From one peculiar pair to another, I present . . . What's that? There's nothing strange about this next gentleman? How dare you insult me by implying that our acts aren't up to snuff! And while you're at it, tip your hat to the lady!

Oh dear. Corgar, I do believe I've completely befuddled this poor George. Do him the honor of sampling your act, so he can understand why we call you . . .

The Half-and-Half

You see, George? I promise the strange and unusual, and that is precisely what I deliver. Now, while you stand

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there attracting flies with that gaping mouth, I shall explain how it is that this Trouper came to us.

Imagine, if you will, the life of the humble Ant. Surrounded by thousands of your kind, an expendable pawn in a vast plan you can scarcely comprehend. Your entire existence dependent upon falling beneath the notice of the Men that tower above you! Such is life in the Burning Peaks, a land I'd never heard of until we visited it just over a year ago.

In that land, the mad ruler of Tovag herds his people into war against his foul neighbor, the unholy ruler of Cavitius, whose name the Half-and-Half will not speak. I say "war," but truly I mean "slaughter." Among these countless sacrifices to their ruler's bloodlust were two young soldiers, a wedded couple by the names of Corgar and Verai. Each was an admirable soldier in their own right, but when playing off each other they conceived brilliant tactics that saved the lives of their comrades countless times. Their true test came just a few weeks before we found them, when their foe, the Whispered One, revealed his most terrible weapon to date: the first of his hideous war engines, crawling behemoths forged from hundreds of corpses and unspeakable, eldritch wizardry. The tale of Verai and Corgar's plan to topple this monstrosity is as thrilling as it is chilling, but 'tis their tale to tell, and in truth our story begins only *after* the war engine's destruction.

As the unholy engine of destruction toppled into a ravine, defeated, Verai and Corgar clasped each other's hands in joy as their legion cheered them on. In that moment, a shadow fell over the battleground, and a loathsome presence made itself known. That was when the Ants realized they had just drawn the attention of a Man.

A writhing darkness swept across the battlefield, driving all present into oblivion. A day passed before Verai regained consciousness. She found the Tovag soldiers merely dead, but her beloved Corgar was utterly gone; annihilated. Her spirit shattered, Verai started the trek back to the capital to report what had occurred. It was during her trip back that the blackouts started. At least once a day, Verai would suddenly find herself miles from where she last stood, hours having passed. When she awoke within the Madhouse of the capital city, she realized what had occurred. In vengeance for destroying his military monstrosity, the Whispered One had decimated her ranks, destroyed her beloved, and rendered her insane.

She decided there was nothing left for her but vengeance. Fighting her way out of the Madhouse, she stole a sword and started to march back toward the land of her foe. The blackouts continued, and after each one she found she had backtracked towards the capital. But always she turned toward Cavitius, marching on, driven

by her singular desire to meet death while carving a path through the undead minions of the Whispered One.

It was within Cavitius that she encountered us. We were camped on the road, our first, and hopefully last, visit to that bleak landscape. Verai simply marched through our camp, barely even noticing us—and you can imagine how distracted one must be not to notice us! Only one person stood in her way: Isolde. Isolde uttered just one short phrase; Verai's legs gave out under her, and she finally surrendered to her woe.

What did Isolde say? Simple: "He's not dead." You see, Corgar had also been wandering between Cavitius and Tovag; he too had been suffering from blackouts. But while Verai had been consumed by vengeance, he was drowning in despair for his lost beloved.

Isolde told us to pull stakes right away—indeed, that was the only time I think I've ever heard a true hint of fear in her voice. We left Cavitius immediately, taking Verai with us, and we've never returned.

Only the next day did we learn the full truth about Verai and Corgar, as did they. Why? Because it wasn't until the next day that Verai transformed into Corgar, of course, finally completing the puzzle of their existence!

When Verai and Corgar's combined tactics defeated his war engine, the Whispered One had placed the two warriors in one body so they could never rely on each other ever again. But it was not an act of vengeance. Ants don't warrant revenge in the eyes of Men. The Whispered One had destroyed their lives for nothing more than a moment's amusement.

For a time, Verai and Corgar were somewhat problematic; for one thing, their transformations back and forth were unpredictable, so they weren't of much use as performers. Another hurdle was that, apparently, neither of them had ever been taught anything other than how to wield a sword. If we had any need for battlefield tactics, I suppose they could have been useful, but for the most part they simply acted like ignorant children!

Matters did start to improve, though, especially when the Twisting claimed them. Hmmm? What is the Twisting? All things change, George. Especially all things in the Carnival. But you needn't concern yourself with that now.

At any rate, until the Twisting set in, Verai would transform into Corgar (or vice versa) at random, and neither had any memory of their time as the other. The Twisting reunited them. Just like a werebeast can take a hybrid form halfway between man and beast, so too can Verai and Corgar take a third form: an uneven mixture of both man and woman. That is the Half-and-Half which stands before you now, and in this form Verai and Corgar can finally be united, two minds and two bodies melded into one. They help each other to heal, now; Verai's presence draws Corgar out of his despair, and Corgar eases Verai's burning hatred. They learn quickly when

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they can support each other, and we've been teaching them a whole new way of life beyond killing and being killed. It may be a bittersweet end, but I believe they've found a measure of happiness.

Still, I must say, their situation is a bit more . . . *intimate* than I think I'd be comfortable with . . .

The Half-and-Half

Not unlike a true lycanthrope, the merged Verai and Corgar can take three forms: female Verai, male Corgar, or the hermaphroditic Half-and-Half. Still bearing deep inner scars from their experiences, Verai is a hostile and unforgiving woman with long, wild auburn hair, blue eyes, and a sleekly muscular frame. Corgar has a somewhat heavier frame, brown eyes, black hair, and the sullen, withdrawn personality born of his fate. As the Half-and-Half, their auburn hair is streaked with black, and while one eye is brown, the other is blue. Their body is similarly melded and uneven; some portions of their physique belong purely to Verai, others to Corgar, while some portions remain a strange mixture of the two. The joining of Verai and Corgar eases the suffering of each, lending the Half-and-Half a serene and confident outlook.

As either Verai or Corgar, they transform from one identity to the other once every 1d20 hours, and neither partner remembers their experiences while in the other's body. However, either can take the form of the Half-and-Half at will, and may remain in this form as long as they wish. The Half-and-Half has access to the memories and abilities of both Corgar and Verai. For these reasons, the Half-and-Half tends to revert to one of its "normal" forms only when the situation demands it pass unnoticed among mundane folk.

Verai, human female, 9th-level avenger: AC 7 (studded leather); MV 12; hp 63; THAC0 12; #AT 3/2; Dmg by weapon; SA long sword specialization; SV blackouts; SZ M; ML elite (14); Str 14, Dex 13, Con 15, Int 15, Wis 6, Cha 14; AL CN

Corgar, human male, F9: AC 7 (studded leather); MV 12; hp 81; THAC0 12; #AT 3/2; Dmg by weapon; SD inspire bravery; SV blackouts; SZ M; ML elite (14); Str 16, Dex 11, Cha 17, Int 13, Wis 8, Cha 12; AL LN

Half-and-Half: AC 7 (studded leather); MV 12; HD 9; hp 72; THAC0 12; #AT 3/2; Dmg by weapon; SA long sword specialization; SD inspire bravery; SZ M; ML champion (16); Str 15, Dex 12, Con 16, Int 14, Wis 7, Cha 13/6; AL N

Hmmm. Usually I prefer to leap from one wildly disparate act to another, using each to exaggerate the others, but I'm rather having fun finding these patterns. So let's continue the game, shall we? Let's find another

Trouper with something in common with the last. Hmmm . . . a warrior struck down by an elemental force. Someone the Carnival found in their own, living purgatory . . . Oho! But of course!

Ronin Thunder

Behold this exotic warrior, hailing from the distant Six Islands of the Sun! Gape at his martial prowess! Wonder at the grace and poise with which he twirls his blades! Yet, you cannot deny that your eyes are drawn to the coils of crackling blue fire snaking over his limbs! Trace the charred trails across his outlandish armor, marking the previous paths of that primal power! Stand in awe of the power of the storm, as you watch Ronin Thunder play with the lightning dancing between his twin swords!

Yes, Ronin Thunder holds nature's wrath within him, and his sad tale is just as thunderous. Many years ago, Ronin Thunder lived in a foreign land far from here, a land which may even lay beyond the Mists. There he was known only by his true name, Renchi Futo. He was an honorable warrior, a chivalrous knight of sorts called a "samurai," sworn to serve his noble and honorable master. Yet even in a land of honor, War had still come to call.

The armies of Renchi's lord and those of his foe met on the honorable field of battle. Renchi and his fellow samurai fought bravely, but a strange fog rolled over the battlefield, scattering their strategy. The blinded battle turned against the forces of Renchi's lord, and the samurai stumbled out of the fog just in time to see his master struck down from behind by an enemy soldier. Renchi had failed his master, but could still avenge him, and so pursued the cowardly assassin deeper into the haze. So intent was Renchi on capturing the killer that all else melted away into the Mists; the sounds of battle, his fellow warriors, and finally even the land itself.

When the Mists parted, Renchi Futo found himself in strange surroundings. He had entered Rokushima Táyoo, a land in the Mists torn by strife and seldom seen by outsiders. Renchi had lost everything; he had lost his home, he had lost his master, and in the latter he had even lost the status of samurai. Now he was called "ronin," a knight without a lord, a status which held no honor. Wandering aimlessly, the warrior found his way to the city of Beikoku. His arrival coincided with an inspection by the island's shujin, Yugami Shimpi, Lord of the North. When visiting merchants revealed themselves to be assassins and attacked the shujin's retinue, Renchi was in position to defeat the villains, and handily them defeat he did! Awed by the foreigner's fighting prowess and discipline, Shimpi invited Renchi to his castle.

Shujin Yugami learned much of Renchi's past. In return, Renchi learned that the islands of Rokushima Táyoo were divided between four warring brothers, all

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struggling to control the empire left behind by their late father. Yugami Shimpi warned Renchi that his brothers, Yoku, Yake, and Yami, were honorless tyrants, whose armies were composed of brutish thugs and fearful assassins. Shujin Yugami was himself as devoid of honor as his brothers, but had a keen eye for Renchi's character. Yugami depicted himself as an honorable lord besieged on all sides by craven villains, and invited Renchi to join his forces. Renchi swore fealty to the Shujin of the North, and regained the exalted status of samurai. Yugami gained a fearsome and loyal warrior, and warned his minions not to shatter the samurai's naiveté.

Renchi served Shujin Yugami for several months, and with honor, though his role was seldom more than that of a glorified bodyguard.

Renchi's illusions were shattered nearly a year after his arrival, when a band of the stealthy assassins known as "ninja" infiltrated his lord's castle. Renchi stood against the killers, saving the life of his lord and routing the killers—but he alone could not prevent tragedy. As one assassin fled the Dawn Castle, he came upon Yugami's eldest son and heir, moments before he was penned in by the shujin's guards. For pure spite, the assassin slew the child before taking his own life.

Shujin Yugami exploded with rage, at last dropping his pretense of honor. None of the assassins had allowed themselves to be taken alive, leaving no way to know which of Yugami's three brothers had sent them. Yugami thus ordered his minions—including Renchi—to go out and slay one of *each* of his brother's children.

This craven order struck Renchi like a thunderbolt. Finally perceiving the true nature of his master, Renchi refused to perform such an honorless act of murder. Yugami understood that his prized pet had at last slipped his leash, and decided to stamp out this smoldering fire without delay.

Yugami informed Renchi that he was bound by honor to obey his lord, and to retain his honor he must either take the life of one of Yugami's nephews, or he must take his own. Devastated, Renchi assented to the order, and left the castle in silence to do what he must. He climbed the mountain rising above the Dawn Castle as a storm rumbled in the sky, and once atop the peak drew his blade to commit his final act. He obeyed this order not out of loyalty to his corrupt lord, but out of shame. He was twice a ronin: first for failing his honorable lord, and again for failing himself in his blind allegiance to the Shujin of the North.

Following the ritual of death, he held the shining steel of his sword aloft, but in the moment before he was to turn the blade upon himself a bolt of lightning flashed from the sky, striking the weapon and warrior who wielded it!

Now, George, this is where we come in. As fate would have it, the Carnival was visiting Rokushima

Táiyoo on that stormy night, and was camped within sight of that flash of elemental fury. Several of the Troupers climbed the slope to investigate, against the advice of their comrades. Atop the peak they found the fallen warrior Renchi Futo, clinging to life and dressed in the same burn-marked armor he wears onstage today. They carried him back to camp, and nursed him back to health. By the time Renchi was well enough to walk, the Carnival had moved on from Rokushima Táiyoo, and the Twisting had moved into his flesh.

That was in the year 745, and the same charge of energy that nearly took his life then still flows through his body to this day! Well, close enough; in fact, he's become a living lightning rod; whenever we encounter a storm, Renchi has to keep well away from the wagons—wherever there's lightning, Ronin Thunder is sure to be struck twice!

Ronin Thunder

Struck by a force of nature in the moment before his death, Renchi Futo now finds the power of lightning has become one with his life-force. Whether this is due to the Twisting, or the act of even more mysterious forces, remains subject to debate. His body attracts electricity; whenever a *lightning bolt* or similar spell is cast within 50' of him, Renchi must make a save vs. wands. If he fails this saving throw, the spell automatically targets him (regardless of the caster's intentions), arcing to strike him. Fortunately, Renchi is all but invulnerable to electrical attacks, suffering only 1 hp of damage for each damage die rolled. For example, a lightning bolt cast by a 7th-level wizard (thus causing 7d6 damage) would only inflict 7 points of damage to Ronin Thunder. In addition, whenever Renchi is struck by an electrical attack, each die of damage is converted into a "charge" that strengthens Renchi's own electrical field. He has the same effect on natural electricity as well, and so after any thunderstorm Renchi will have gained 1d20 charges (and taken an equal number of points of damage).

Ronin Thunder can use his electrical charge in several ways. First, whenever he strikes a target in melee combat (or is *struck* in melee), he automatically expends one charge to inflict 1d6 points of electrical damage to his opponent. This effect is involuntary, and Renchi must always be careful to keep a safe distance from those around him. In a similar fashion, Renchi uses up about a charge a day in his act, willing streamers of electricity to dance over his scorched armor and weapons.

Renchi can also use his thunderbolts in a more directly offensive fashion. By using the ritual techniques he uses to focus his life-force, Renchi can channel his energy into a bolt of lightning. For each charge he expends, this lightning bolt adds 10' to its maximum range, inflicts an additional 1d6 points of damage, and

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inflicts 1 point of damage to Renchi himself. He can channel a number of charges equal to his Hit Dice into a single attack; thus, Renchi's most powerful thunderbolt has a maximum range of 70', inflicts 7d6 points of damage on his target, and 7 points of damage to himself.

A common topic of Trouper justice is why Renchi has never sworn allegiance to Isolde, Mistress of the Carnival. Presumably, such an oath would warrant Renchi's return to the status of samurai; it is well-known that he considers his current status a disgrace. Sensing the ronin's ambivalence, Professor Pacali has approached Renchi and attempted to draw him into the fold.

(Professor Pacali and his theories on Isolde's true identity are fully detailed in *Carnival*.) Although Ronin Thunder believes the professor's theories, he has not joined Pacali's cause, leading to even more questions and gossip.

Why Renchi has declined to swear fealty to either Isolde or her foes is related to the mystery surrounding the lightning bolt that led to his current state. While some may believe that the dark powers chose to preserve their toy for future games, Ronin Thunder's theory is somewhat more basic: He believes he is dead.

Specifically, he believes that the fateful thunderbolt slew him in a state of dishonor, and that he is now doomed to wander in this strange purgatory until the elements that damned him to this fate choose to release him. He believes the other Troupers are penitent spirits like himself, and that Isolde may well be the fiend Pacali portrays her to be. Yet Renchi accepts this, and plays his role, his emotionless face hidden onstage by a scowling mask, waiting for the storm that will finally send him to his ultimate rest.

Renchi Futo, human male, F7 (samurai): AC 6 (brigandine armor); MV 12; hp 40; THAC0 14 (13 w/katana); #AT 2; Dmg 1d10+1 (katana); SA electrical burst; SD electrical charge; SZ M; ML fanatic (17); Str 16, Dex 12, Con 13, Int 15, Wis 13, Cha 9; AL LN

Notes: If you use kits in your campaign and have access to *The Complete Fighter's Handbook*, Ronin Thunder has all the abilities of the Samurai kit as detailed in that accessory. Otherwise, consider Ronin Thunder a fighter specialized in the katana (alternate: long sword) and daikyu (alternate: long bow).

Now, George, feast your eyes on our next—wait a moment. Do you see that, George? Over there, beyond Madame Fortuna's wagon. Yes, the one painted like a celestial sky. Do you see that figure standing at the edge of the camp, skulking in shadows? Hmmm. Has that night come upon us once again? So it has! The curtain has risen, and . . .

The Performance Repeats

Step lively, George, and stick close to me. It's high time you went home, and I'll walk you there myself, just to be sure. While we wander, I'll tell you who that pale figure was, and why our camp is no place for you tonight. Are you in the mood for a ghost story? No? Pity, because you're about to hear one.

While I was herding you around the big ring, surely you saw some of our painted, silent Vistani, the Skurra? They're a skurry lot, to be sure. We Troupers aren't even sure what they are; some say they're alive, some claim they're ghosts, and some say they're neither! Well, all that guessing and gossip stops when it comes to the Nameless One. We all know exactly what he is.

But I get ahead of myself. It's best to tell a tale from its beginning; that was in the year 744. A Vistani named Grigori came to Isolde's Carnival seeking solace. At the time, there were only a handful of Skurra, and then as now they turned away none of their own kind. Grigori donned the Skurra-*vera* paints, and adopted the life of silence, leaving his name—and his past—behind. It was known that Grigori had been cast out from his tribe, but the full reasons behind this act were unknown even to his kin.

In the years since, we've learned more about Grigori's secrets. All the Skurra had left their tribes for one reason or another, making them what they call *mortu*, a word they insist we never translate correctly. But Grigori faced a much different form of exile. He had fled his tribe to avoid facing permanent, ritual exile, the *shalach-ti*, the worst fate a Vistani can envision. Had the ritual taken place, it would have severed Grigori's connection to both his tribe and the land, making him into a *darkling*, a Vistani bogeyman.

We still don't know exactly what he did to earn the wrath of his kin; the Vistani refuse to speak of his kind. They treat Grigori as if he never existed. Regardless, Grigori came to Carnival to hide from the justice of his tribe. And even as Grigori asked the Carnival to take him in, he could sense his own growing evil gnawing at his tattered soul.

Perhaps Grigori hoped to hide from the horror within himself. Perhaps Isolde sensed this spark of repentance within Grigori's heart, explaining why she took no action. The Skurra-*vera* magic can protect its wearer from many things, 'tis true, but it cannot protect the wearer from threats that fester within. Despite finding this haven, perhaps despite even Grigori's own hopes, his descent into damnation could not be stopped.

Several months after Grigori became a Skurra, not long before my own arrival in fact, the Carnival was camped outside a large town—the name escapes me, and is quite unimportant. The Carnival had been entertaining the Georges there for several days when the local militia marched on the campsite. Those soldiers' faces were grim, and their weapons were held tight; the Troupers

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feared an attack, but Isolde advised them to take no action. Isolde's instincts proved correct, for the militia merely presented a distraught couple demanding the return of their child. They claimed this child had visited the Carnival two days earlier, and not been seen since. Many Troupers were outraged by the Georges' accusations, but Isolde again kept them in check. To preserve the peace, she even allowed the Georges to search the campsite. That decision alone tells me that she suspected the Georges were in the right, painful as that phrase is to say!

The child was found. Her broken body was stuffed into a hidden compartment inside one of the vardos. The discovery was even more dreadful for the Troupers than it was for the Georges. The Georges demanded justice, and the Troupers began to throw accusations at the silent, standoffish Skurra; our beloved Carnival was in danger of tearing itself apart. For their part, the Skurra retreated to their wagons, looking to their own number to find the guilty party. It didn't take long.

When the Skurra emerged again, they produced two revelations. The first was that one of their number, Madame Fortuna, had chosen to forgo the protection of the Skurra-*vera* so that her people might have a voice. She defended her kin by producing the second revelation: Blood had been found under Grigori's nails. Fortuna announced that the Skurra had decided on Grigori's punishment, and produced the obsidian dagger used in the rite of *shalach-ti*.

The fate the Skurra had intended for Grigori is not the fate he received. Incensed, the Troupers seized Grigori and the dagger, ignoring Fortuna's protests. They bound him to a post, and on that night Grigori faced the full fury of the Carnival's wrath: The Death of the Thousand Knives. The Skurra could not interfere; Isolde would not interfere. The Georges could scarce deny that justice had been done, and allowed the Carnival to go on its way.

Despite his grisly death, the curtain had not yet fallen for Grigori. One year to the day after his demise, he took the stage again. Perhaps because he died within the Carnival's grounds, his spirit is now forever tied to its travels. Perhaps because he was still wearing the Skurra-*vera* when he breathed his last, death could not find his spirit. Whatever the reason, every year since and on the anniversary of his death, he who Madame Fortuna will only call the Nameless One returns to the Carnival. I was there to see his first appearance, and I've been here every time the performance repeats.

The Nameless One looks just like any other Skurra—I'm far from convinced that he's the only ghost among them—and although no blood flows through those spectral veins, he looks and feels as solid as you or I. He's a gaunt and withered figure, his ethereal body wasted away by evil. His Skurra-*vera* mask is bone-

white, save for what looks like black tears surrounding his sunken eyes and streaming down his hollow cheeks. Look closer and you see all those little black tears are actually daggers, silhouettes of the obsidian blade that slew him.

In all the years since his death, the Nameless One has sought only one thing: to demonstrate his repentance, to redeem himself in the eyes of the Carnies and his kin. He forever seeks to win back a place in the only home he knows. Each year, on the very day he died, the Nameless One returns to the Carnival to exhibit his latest desperate act of redemption. But sadly, for some deeds there can be no salvation, and when Fortuna invariably refuses his pleas, his foul and rotted core reveals itself again. Some years, it feels no less rehearsed than my own spiels. It's all just a repeat performance, and it will repeat again.

So if you're ever in a bind, George, and you find yourself approached by a silent harlequin with daggers for tears, be wary. The Nameless One may want to be a savior, but he's no saint. It's not you he wants to save, it's himself.

The Nameless One

Full details of the Skurra, Skurra-*vera*, Madame Fortuna, and the Skurra's uncertain relationship with death are provided in Chapter Two of *Carnival*.

The Dungeon Master can introduce the Nameless One whenever the heroes are overwhelmed and facing destruction. The Nameless One will appear without warning, wordlessly attempting to guide the heroes to safety. In fact, the Nameless One can easily be added to any adventure where the goal is primarily to escape the domain and/or minions of a darklord, including *Web of Illusion*, *Dark of the Moon*, or even *House of Strahd*.

If the Nameless One appears, he has chosen to lead the heroes to the safety of Carnival as this year's act of "redemption." This works particularly well if the player characters are already on friendly terms with the Carnival. The Nameless One always knows Carnival's current location, and can unerringly lead others to its campground, even if such a journey requires traveling through the Mists. So long as the heroes cooperate with their eerie guide he will act as their protector, but he will brook no interference, not even from those under his protection. He will ignore initial signs of suspicion, but if a character is adamant in his distrust of the mysterious Skurra, and seems likely to sway the others into following his lead, the Nameless One will try to discretely eliminate this threat to his redemption. He will not hesitate to murder one hero to ensure the loyalty of the rest. If the heroes uncover the Nameless One's betrayal, he will attempt to destroy them all, for fear of his crimes becoming known to the Skurra.

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While accompanying the Nameless One, the heroes may sense that they are being followed, and not just by the evil forces their guide is helping them to avoid. Each day at dawn and dusk, upon making a Wisdom check a single hero should be given the chance to spot a solitary figure trailing the group. If the check succeeds, the character catches a momentary glimpse of a skeletal, hooded figure bearing a corroded scythe. However, the heroes can never find this spectre if they go searching for it. Although the heroes may fear that this grim figure is following them, it is in fact an emissary of death in endless pursuit of the Nameless One himself!

If the heroes continue to cooperate with their bizarre benefactor, he will indeed eventually lead them to Carnival. Although the Troupers will allow the heroes to enter the ring of wagons, stone-faced Skurra stop the Nameless One at the edge of camp. Madame Fortuna herself blocks the Nameless One's path, coldly informing him that he has no place in Carnival; he must move on to where he truly belongs.

At this rebuke, the Nameless One becomes visibly enraged. Although he remains utterly silent, heroes with the Lip Reading proficiency can follow as he furiously insists that he has done good—that he has saved the lives of Carnival kin. How much good must he do? How many lives must he save before he is forgiven?

A Skurra relays Grigori's silent message to Madame Fortuna with gestures; Fortuna herself does not seem to be able to see the Nameless One. Her reply is unyielding: "Pah. Your hands are black with evil. You can never wash them clean."

At this final refusal, Grigori flies into a mad rage, his inner corruption boiling to the surface. His fury turns to violence, and he aims his first attacks at those he has led to safety, the player characters, as if saving their lives was a wasted effort if it does not help him achieve his own goals. The Skurra will come to their aid, and experienced heroes should be able to defeat the Nameless One, despite his unusual powers. However, when he is finally defeated, the heroes may be in for one final shock: As the Nameless One suffers a fatal blow, his body fades away to vapor, leaving nothing behind but a chill breeze. If the characters were unaware that their guide was a spirit, this may prompt horror checks.

Grigori, the Nameless One, is a third-magnitude corporeal ghost, using the classification system provided by Dr. Van Richten. He has all the immunities common to ghosts, and can only be harmed by magical weapons of at least +1 enchantment. As a corporeal spirit, ethereal foes gain no special bonuses to combat him. He suffers 1d6 damage if struck by holy water, and can be turned with a -1 penalty. Obsidian weapons inflict full damage, even if not magical.

Grigori's torturous final moments, tightly bound while suffering one stabbing after another, have granted

him two special powers. First, with a successful attack roll the Nameless can *cause paralysis*. His victim must successfully save vs. paralyzation at a -2 penalty or be unable to move for 2d4 hours; their limbs will actually feel as though they have been tightly bound together.

Alternatively, the Nameless One's touch can *cause wounds*, also requiring a successful attack roll. The victim will feel such a touch as a biting stab wound, suffering 1d8 points of damage. In addition, there is percentage chance equal to the points of damage inflicted that the attack will leave a vicious scar, reducing the victim's Charisma by one point.

If the Nameless One is reduced to 0 hp, his ethereal body instantly dissipates, but he will always return the following year. To send the Nameless One to his final rest, the heroes must remove the Skurra-vera paints from his face. This requires the spells *remove curse* and *dispel magic* be cast on him within one round of each other. If the Nameless One's Skurra-vera is dispelled, he becomes visible to the death which has blindly sought him for nearly a decade; a grim reaper immediately appears, latches on to Grigori's flailing and shrieking spirit, and drags him away to his fate. The performance will repeat no more.

The Nameless One (third-magnitude corporeal ghost):

AC 4; MV 12; HD 7; hp 32; THAC0 14; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 (*cause wounds*); SA paralysis; SD +1 or better weapon to hit, undead immunities; SV obsidian weapons; SZ M; ML steady (12); Str 9, Dex 15, Con N/A, Int 12, Wis 11, Cha 6; AL CE; XP 2,000.

Personality: paranoid, desperate

Well, George, home again, home again! I do so hope you enjoyed your visit, and I do so hope you'll let us stay. Do please come and visit us tomorrow, but do bring coppers so you can pay!



ZARDORUS

His Trail is Paved with Good Intentions

by Daniel Bandera

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BIOGRAPHY

Obsession often leads a soul down the path to darkness. Despite the noble goal of one man's quest, his obsession has led him to take measures that most would find despicable. As the mage Zardorus continues on his quest, he edges closer and closer to the darkness of evil.

Zardorus

9th-level Necromancer (Deathslayer),

Lawful Neutral

Armor Class	7	Str	11
Movement	12	Dex	17
Level/Hit Dice	9	Con	9
Hit Points	24	Int	17
THAC0	18	Wis	15
Morale	15	Cha	11
No. of Attacks	1	XP	2,000
Damage/Attack	By weapon		
Special Attacks	Spells		
Special Defenses	Spells		
Magic Resistance	Nil		

Appearance

Zardorus is a man approaching middle age, but his hair, once dark black but now prematurely gray, and his sickly pallor make him appear much older. His eyes, which once sparked with an inquisitive nature, are dull black and appear sunken. His skin has a gray sickly color, and he is so gaunt that one could count his ribs if Zardorus were to go bare-chested. This he never does though, and always wears unadorned brown robes. These robes conceal a round magical rune that has been branded into the center of his chest. Zardorus is very ashamed of this, as it reminds him of a horrible, life-altering event from his past.

Background

Zardorus was born almost forty years ago in the land of Darkon to a successful merchant family. At an early age he showed a high degree of intelligence, and when of age he was sent to study at the university of Il Aluk. While he excelled at many subjects, his interests soon turned to the magical and the macabre. His desire was to learn the secrets of life, so that he could learn how to prolong his existence and those of his loved ones. Finding his magical tutors too squeamish to delve after the answers he sought, Zardorus approached a professor who had been expelled by the university. The professor had moved from the city to a small hamlet a short distance from town to continue his studies in seclusion, but Zardorus was determined to find a teacher, and so he approached the man.

The professor, Dascampen, was a necromancer, who studied the secrets of death and the extension of life. Dascampen agreed to take Zardorus on as an apprentice. Over the next two years, as the necromancer's apprentice, Zardorus learned many of the evil magical secrets of necromancy, absorbing this lore with a detached, inquisitive nature. He believed that the experiments he carried out in the search for knowledge were not evil or malign, simply necessary for the furthering of knowledge. During these years, Zardorus believed his master, Dascampen, shared his beliefs. However, this was not the case.

One night, Zardorus awoke to find himself strapped to a table with his master standing over him, the only light coming from a fiery brazier near his feet. His limbs bound, his mouth gagged, he could do nothing as Dascampen began to perform an arcane ceremony. After reciting from magical text an enchantment Zardorus did not recognize, his master removed an iron brand from the brazier. As Dascampen approached with the iron, Zardorus was able to see the end was shaped into a mystic symbol, one Zardorus knew as the symbol for living death. His scream was muffled by his gag, as the necromancer pressed the iron against his chest, burning the symbol into his skin above his heart.

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When the pain cleared from his eyes, Zardorus could see Dascampen unstopping a beaker. The glass contained a noxious greenish substance that seemed as much gaseous as liquid. His master had approached him, and was unloosening the gag around his mouth, when a commotion was heard.

Seconds later a door was knocked in and the blaring lights of a dozen torches filled the room. The peasants of the nearby hamlet had discovered the remains of some of the necromancer's experiments, and together with a band of good-aligned priests had come to the necromancer's adobe to lynch him. Dascampen lashed out with his spells, but he had been too concerned with the ceremony and was unprepared for combat.

The mob quickly overwhelmed him. They dragged Dascampen from the house to a nearby tree, from which he was hung. As the necromancer died, the priests prepared a large pyre and the evil master necromancer's body was thrown onto it. Meanwhile the peasant mob ravaged the necromancer's home.

Zardorus was freed by the mob, and the leader of the band of priests, mistaking him for an innocent victim, told Zardorus he had been lucky and was free to go. The priests healed his wounds but could not removed the brand burned into his chest.

Zardorus, feeling confused and betrayed, remained in the hamlet, unsure of where to go or how to continue. Days after the attack, he secretly returned to his master's abode and went to his master's secret library. He knew the library was hidden too well for the mob to have discovered it, and knew its magical secrets would remain intact. There he uncovered Dascampen's notes, and learned what his master had planned for him. Dascampen was experimenting with a process to become a lich, and had meant to test the process on Zardorus to see if it would work. Horrified by what his master had tried to do, Zardorus made a decision that changed his life. No longer would he spend his time locked in a laboratory seeking unholy secrets. Zardorus vowed to rid the world of all undead monsters and those that would create them.

Taking his master's spellbooks and research manuals, Zardorus began his studies in necromancy anew. This time Zardorus was searching for the secrets to destroying undead monstrosities, and over the next few years he has developed into a powerful foe against the undead.

Current Sketch

In the years since his former master was killed, Zardorus has become a powerful necromancer. He continues his single-minded obsession to seek out and destroy undead anywhere they can be found. His crusade has taken him across all of the known domains of Ravenloft, and he has destroyed numerous undead creatures of all types. However, Zardorus does not dwell on his past successes.

His focus is always on those creatures that escaped his wrath or those still out there that he has not yet destroyed.

Despite the noble ends that Zardorus seeks, his methods are not always acceptable to those of a good mind. As he has become more obsessed with his quest, he leans closer to evil. He has already killed numerous bystanders, caught within the area of effect of his spells. He may well also consider kidnapping innocents to use them as bait to draw out undead creatures. As he continues down his path, Zardorus' concern for the welfare of others will decrease more and more.

Personality

Zardorus has an obsessive personality. He rarely talks about anything but his quest. He judges everyone he meets by whether they can help him in his quest or hinder him. Those that he believes are a great hindrance he may eliminate. He is ruthless and humorless, never smiling or laughing, always grim.

During his quest, he has developed a hatred for those mortals who raise undead creatures. Any mage he meets is under suspicion. Thus Zardorus never accepts other mages as acquaintances or companions. Priests are a different story. He hates those evil cultists that deal with the undead, but he also hates the good-aligned clerics for their weakness in being unable to destroy the undead. Those good-aligned priests that he meets he belittles and questions their faith. He will shout at any priest that attempts to turn undead in his presence, as he feels he will just have to track down the monsters again.

Combat

In combat, Zardorus relies on his spells and his detailed knowledge of the undead. He has adapted many necromantic spells to help him in his quest against the undead. As a necromancer he inflicts a -1 penalty on all saving throws versus his necromancy spells. Zardorus' hatred is strongest against spell using undead and he has studied the liches closely to learn how to destroy them. Liches suffer an additional -2 penalty to saving throws vs. his spells. In addition, thanks to Zardorus' vast necrological knowledge, he gains a +2 bonus to save against any magical attacks by liches, including both their spells and their paralyzing touch, and a +2 bonus to hit liches in combat. Because of his acute specialization, none of the above penalties, including the typical -1 penalty to saving throws due to his specialization as a necromancer, are suffered by mortal beings.

Zardorus can cast the following number of spells per day: 1st: 5, 2nd: 4, 3rd: 4, 4th: 3, 5th: 2. In his studies into the nature of various undead creatures, Zardorus has modified the various following necromantic spells to be of better use in his quest against the undead:

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Chill Touch

Causes 1d4 points of damage to undead. Living beings take no damage but must save versus death or flee.

Vampiric Touch

Drains undead of 1d6 hit points per two levels of the caster. The caster gains no hit points, but loses 1 hp for each die of hp drained from the undead creature. Living beings cannot be drained of hit points by this spell.

Spirit Armor

(Tome of Magic) In addition to granting AC 4, this spell grants the same protection as a *negative plane protection* spell. However, it offers no AC protection to attacks from non-undead creatures.

Enervation

The bolt drains 1 HD for every four levels of the caster from one undead creature. The negative energy is transferred into the caster who loses half the levels that the target lost, due to the influx of negative energy. Both the target's and the caster's levels return at the end of the spell's duration.

Animate Dead

This version ends the *animate dead* spell on zombies or skeletons returning them to an inanimate state. One creature is affected for every two levels of the caster. When cast on more powerful undead creatures, it acts as a *raise dead* spell and may destroy creatures that are vulnerable to that spell, such as the wight.

Bone Blight

(The Complete Book of Necromancers) This version has been modified to be affective against undead creatures. It is also contagious and can be spread from one undead creature to another, unless a save vs. death magic is made with a +2 bonus.



ARDONK SZERIEZA

A Cause Does Not a Hero Make

by Stuart Turner
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Author's Note: With thanks to Steve Miller, who introduced this character to us in *Domains of Dread*.

BIOGRAPHY

Ardonk Szerieza is a young ethnic Gundarakite in the domain of Barovia. While most of his fellow citizens suffer passively under the Barovian boyars and burgomeisters, Ardonk has taken it upon himself to rise up against his oppressors.

Ardonk's life, however, is at a turning point. As his determination to liberate his people grows, so does the price he is willing to pay.

Appearance

At first sight, most would think of Ardonk Szerieza as nothing more than a young scrap of a man. His appearance is unassuming, and not dissimilar from other Gundarakites; black hair, dark brown eyes, and a thin beard that belies his young age. He generally wears a poor quality shirt and brown vest, but if undertaking any dangerous activity he will wear a leather vest that he stole from a Barovian under his shirt.

Ardonk Szerieza

3rd-Level Human Thief, Neutral

Armor Class	8	Str	10
Movement	12	Dex	16
Level/Hit Dice	5	Con	11
Hit Points	22	Int	15
THAC0	18	Wis	11
No. of Attacks	1	Cha	17
Damage/Attack	By weapon		
Special Attacks	Nil		
Special Defenses	Nil		
Magic Resistance	Nil		
Thief Abilities	PP 20 OL 65 F/RT 25 RL 0 MS 30 HS 30 DN 15 CW 60		

Background

In the year 730, Ardonk was born to a poor family that worked on a farm outside Zeidenburg. Life was hard, as it was for every family under the reign of Duke Gundar, but Ardonk recalls little of the harshness of that time.

What Ardonk *does* remember, however, is the joy that came with Gundar's assassination in 736. One of his earliest memories is of being carried through the fields of wheat above his father's head, while his mother danced around them, on the day they learned that the Duke had been killed. Never had his parents been so happy, but their joy was unfortunately to be short-lived.

Though too young to understand the events that followed, Ardonk keenly noticed the decline in his parents' mood over the next years as Strahd annexed the former Gundarak. Only as he became older did he realize how painfully brief their freedom had been before the tyrant Gundar was replaced by the tyrant Strahd.

Ardonk might have lived his life as any other Gundarakite, if not a tragic occurrence just before the youth turned eighteen. The despair of his aging and ill father had been growing since the arrival of a particularly cruel and extortionate Barovian boyar, and the family had little money left with which to buy any food at all. Ardonk had been working hard in the field, desperately attempting to meet the boyar's unreasonable demands for produce, and returned home late in the evening. Unable to find his father, he eventually looked in the stable—to find his father swinging slowly from the ceiling by his neck. Two days later, his mother was found downstream, apparently having drowned herself after discovering her husband's suicide.

For more than a year, Ardonk continued to work on the farm, satisfying the demands of the boyar that he now hated with all the emotion he could bring to bear. As time went on, however, he found himself directing his frustration not only at the Barovian taskmasters, but also at his own father. If only he hadn't been so weak, he thought, he wouldn't have given in so easily to the boyar. Thinking of the fragment of joy he remembered from his childhood, he realized that hope for the return of such a

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day was useless without action. He realized that unless someone decided to take a stand, their lives would remain unchanged for eternity.

The following evening, Ardonk fled the farm and disappeared into the Barovian night. He gathered support from other disenchanting young men, and began planting the seeds of rebellion among the Gundarakites.

Since then, he has gradually built up a secret network of contacts and supporters around Zeidenburg and Teufeldorf. Isolated, and seemingly random incidents of violence between Gundarakites and Barovians have been sparked as a result of his actions, and more than one Barovian boyar has suffered, either physically or financially, due to Ardonk's agitation of the people against Lord Strahd.

Current Sketch

Ardonk's five years of struggle against the Barovian occupation has produced significant results. He now has around seventy known safe houses throughout the domain, where he can meet with fellow conspirators. The activities of Ardonk and his rebels vary enormously, from the burning of a wealthy Barovian's stables, to providing assistance to families made destitute under the extreme taxation laws, to actual incitement of violence between ethnic Barovians and Gundarakites.

The Barovian laws against weapon ownership among Gundarakites have greatly limited their military power, but this has not proven a significant problem. Most of the actions taken by the rebels are largely covert or manipulative, rather than confrontational. Ardonk is well aware that he would require a massive wellspring of support before any sort of violent rebellion could ever take place, so he prefers subtler tactics.

In recent times, Ardonk has become increasingly frustrated. He has found that the people's fear of their overlords has greatly limited his audience. While nearly all Gundarakites will express a profound hope that a day will come when they are free of tyranny, Ardonk has found that surprisingly few are willing to act on that hope, preferring to believe that the Morninglord will bring that day to them. Even among those who do actively support his actions, Ardonk has discovered that many turn to water in the face of authority and are ineffective when real action is required.

Increasingly, Ardonk has found his thoughts turning elsewhere for support against the boyars and burgomeisters. Through his contacts, he has learned that Castle Hunadora, lying within the Invidian-occupied portion of his homeland, has become the headquarters of a group of rebels who oppose the tyrant Malocchio Aderre. Ardonk believes that an alliance between his amateur militia and the rebels, led by Malocchio's own mother Gabrielle Aderre, could be of benefit to both

sides. To date he has only met Gabrielle once, at which time she hinted at her longer-term plans to play each of their respective enemies against one another.

Ardonk is yet to act on this idea, but is beginning to push the concept among his fellow rebels. Many of them are a little concerned about his zealotry, however, and doubt whether inciting a war with Malocchio of Invidia could be of benefit to their people.

Personality

When Ardonk first fled his farm and began to work against the Barovians, his heart was full of noble intentions. He wanted to lift the status of the Gundarakites to be the equal of the Barovians, or to expel Strahd's lackeys and let his people experience freedom as they did after the death of Duke Gundar.

Ardonk's motives have not changed in the years since, but his approach to success most definitely has. As his frustration has grown at the lack of real results, the price he is willing to pay for victory has also grown. Whereas the Ardonk of 19 years would have been loathe to put any of his associates at risk, his recent actions have resulted in the death of several Gundarakites (including the stunt against the boyar Ivan Szimin—see the article "The Effigy of Ivan Szimin" for more details). Increasingly, he sees these deaths as an appropriate sacrifice for the good of his people, and a necessary one if they are ever to discover true freedom again.

Ardonk is therefore a much more bitter person than he was five years ago. Listeners are struck by the intensity with which he speaks, and the seriousness with which he presents his plans. He rarely smiles when doing "business," yet remains incredibly persuasive.

Ardonk has a growing intolerance of those Gundarakites unwilling to support his cause. In many ways, he sees Gundarak's current condition as the fault of those men and women who seem so willing to let tyrants rule their lives without question. Similarly, he is disdainful of the Cult of the Morninglord. He sees their dependence on a god to act on their behalf as something that only perpetuates their current subservience.

Combat

Prohibited by Barovian law from possessing any weapon larger than a dagger, Ardonk is not terribly effective in combat. This is not usually a problem, however, as he largely avoids direct confrontation, preferring to manipulate events from a distance. When forced to enter combat, he uses a simple dagger. In potentially dangerous situations, he will always wear his leather jerkin to protect himself, which improves his AC by 1.

Ardonk is, however, quite adept at thievery, as reflected in his skills listed above. ☞

MOCELLUS

Undeath in the Desert

by Daniel Bandera

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BIOGRAPHY

The past of Athas is filled with blood and death. The Cleansing Wars, begun by Rajaan the Destroyer, attempted to exterminate many sentient races. One elf who joined this genocidal crusade was Mocellus of Waverly. Centuries later, he continues to carry out his demented plans.

Appearance

As a raaig (*DARK SUN® MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix II*) Mocellus' elven heritage is no longer recognizable. He appears dressed in the tattered remains of his priestly robes. The robes, once a dark crimson, are now blackened by soot, and their remnants cling to Mocellus' body. A ceremonial cloak remains tied around his neck, with the hood thrown back to expose Mocellus' horrid face. His head is skeletal, with no flesh remaining. His eyes are two glowing orange spots. His entire body is surrounded by red-black flames to a distance of three feet. A mace, which he never uses, is strapped to his side. A herald on the back of his cloak is the symbol of the evil entity he worshipped. But it is too marred, as if by flames, to be identified.

Background

Mocellus lived during the Green Age of Athas, in the city of Waverly, now long since buried by desert sands. He belonged to a cult that worshipped an evil being they called Nezzan. The doctrine of Nezzan required the daily sacrifice of a sentient being. The cult operated in secret for many years in Waverly, until it was discovered and driven from the city by a mob of outraged citizens. During the turmoil, the mob killed many of the cult members, including the leader. In the wake of this attack, Mocellus took control of the handful of survivors and led them into hiding. In a small cave not far from the city, they tried to continue their worship.

Mocellus

Raaig, 10th-Level Cleric, Chaotic Evil

Armor Class	0	Str	N/A
Movement	9, Fl 18 (B)	Dex	N/A
Level/Hit Dice	10	Con	N/A
Hit Points	47	Int	9
THAC0	13	Wis	14
No. of Attacks	1	Cha	9
Morale	17	XP	5,000
Damage/Attack	1d8+2 or by weapon		
Special Attacks	Cause disease, spells		
Special Defenses	Immune to <i>sleep</i> , <i>charm</i> , or <i>hold</i> magic, poison and paralyzation; +1 or better to be hit; spells		
Magic Resistance	Nil		

A few years later, a former citizen of Waverly returned to the city. Known as Uyness, she had become a champion of Rajaan, the Destroyer. She asked the citizens to join her in a campaign to wipe the plague of orcs from the face of Athas. The people of Waverly readily agreed and formed an army to join Uyness' crusade. The war went well for the army of Waverly, but they soon faced an unexpected problem. During the war many orcs surrendered and were taken captive, and Uyness ordered her forces to kill any captured orcs. While the citizens of Waverly were willing to kill orcs in battle, it was against their ethical beliefs to kill the old, the young, and the wounded who surrendered to them.

Learning of the city's dilemma, Mocellus sensed an opportunity for his cult to gain prestige, and secretly approached the city's leaders. He told the leaders that he would take the orc prisoners and dispose of them, using the orcs as sacrifices in his ceremonies. Though disgusted by Mocellus and his evil beliefs, the leaders were glad to have found a solution to their problem before Uyness discovered the prisoners. Thus they agreed to the proposition and began sending captured orcish males, females, and children to Mocellus to be sacrificed on his bloody altar to Nezzan.

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Over time Nezjan's altar was drenched in orcish blood, but Mocellus did not believe the evil entity could be pleased by receiving only filthy orcish blood. He began to kidnap humans from Waverly for sacrifice. His dealings with the town leaders had led the citizens of Waverly to tolerate Mocellus, so he no longer had to conceal his presence, allowing him to stalk his chosen victims unmolested.

Despite the years of sacrifices and devotion to Nezjan, the evil entity never answered Mocellus' pleas for power. Eventually, Mocellus reasoned that his evil god could only be satisfied by the purest blood: elven blood, that of his own kind. Soon, elves began disappearing in Waverly.

In time, Mocellus' bloody deeds were discovered by an elven soldier who was escorting captured orcs to Mocellus' cave. In a refuge pile, he recognized a bracelet his missing sister had worn. When he reported this, the city was outraged. A mob formed, this time led by the elven soldier and his comrades. They attacked the shrine and killed Mocellus' acolytes. The mob then tied Mocellus to the bloodied altar of Nezjan, and set the blasphemous pair on fire. That night, Mocellus rose from the fire's smoldering ashes as a raaig.

Current Sketch

Mocellus still haunts the cave that contained the altar to Nezjan. Over a millennium later, when Kalidnay was transported into Ravenloft, the Mists captured Mocellus' lair as well and deposited it in the new domain. Now his cave lies on the edge of that domain, overlooking the Silt Sea. Mocellus is linked to the altar, and he cannot move more than a mile from it in any direction.

Those approaching within half a mile of Mocellus' cave can hear faint chanting in a strange language. Approaching the cave, the curious will find Mocellus prostrated before a blood-soaked altar. Mocellus will realize there are trespassers present in moments and turn invisible. He then warns the visitors in a whispery, cracked voice that death has come for them and doom of all the citizens of Waverly. If the trespassers do not flee at once, Mocellus attacks them with all his powers.

Mocellus also continues his quest for blood. He attacks travelers that pass near his lair, attempting to drag a victim back to his altar for sacrifice. He prefers elves over any other, and will not kill an elf in combat if he can capture him and bring the poor elf back to his bloody altar for sacrifice.

Personality

Years of service to an evil entity weakened Mocellus' grip on reality. With his transformation into unlife and his centuries of existence, his mind has deteriorated into

madness. He has lost all concept of time and still believes he is living in ancient Waverly. Mocellus can remember little of his life or the centuries that have passed since then. His memory is very weak, and he has trouble remembering events that happened only days before. Opponents that escape from Mocellus' clutches will be forgotten in a week's time.

He does remember his death, and believes his undead state is a blessing from Nezjan. Mocellus hates the people of Waverly, whom he believes have rejected Nezjan and himself, and he weaves unrealistic, unobtainable plots to destroy the city, such as drowning it in the Silt Sea, or destroying it in a massive sand storm. His diseased mind confuses Kalidnay with Waverly, and his schemes are now aimed against the citizens of Kalidnay.

Although Mocellus can still speak, he rarely does so. However, like all raaigs, Mocellus has the innate power to communicate with any intelligent creature, and thus can speak and understand the languages of any who trespass into his lair.

Combat

Anyone closing within 3' of Mocellus suffers 1d4 points of damage from the flames that surround him. With a successful attack, Mocellus' touch causes 1d8+2 points of damage, and the victim must save vs. spell. If the save fails, the dark flames surrounding the raaig spread to the victim. The victim takes 2d6 points of damage each round until he successfully saves vs. spell, which extinguishes the flames.

Since his entrance into Ravenloft, Mocellus has been able to cast spells as a 10th-level cleric. It is likely that the dark powers grant Mocellus' spells, since the evil deity Nezjan never actually existed. In addition, once per day Mocellus can cast a special version of *animate dead* on the remains of any sacrificial victims in his cave. The spell only lasts until the next sunrise, when the undead creatures will collapse into a pile of silt. The animated dead will serve Mocellus faithfully, but are bound to the same area as he.

As a raaig, Mocellus can become invisible and/or ethereal at will. While ethereal, he cannot be harmed. Even when in corporeal form, he can only be wounded by +1 or better magical weapons. However, non-magical weapons crafted by elven smiths will harm Mocellus while he is corporeal. He is immune to *sleep*, *charm*, *hold*, poison, and paralyzation. Holy water and holy symbols do not affect him.

A *raise dead* spell will destroy Mocellus if he fails a save vs. spell. Unlike most undead Mocellus is not immune to cold-based attacks. In fact, he is unusually vulnerable to such attacks, taking an additional +1 per die of damage from any cold-based attack. ☠

MERILEE MARKUZA

Sugar and Spice and Everything Nice

by Leyshon Campbell
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“Sugar and spice, and everything nice;
that’s what little girls are made of.”

—Old English Proverb

INTRODUCTION

The Isle of Agony in Lamordia boasts an assortment of terrors that would have the immortal vampire cowering in fear, yet one of the most diabolical of the isle’s fiends is neither stitched together nor horrendous to behold. She has retained all her pieces in pristine condition, just as the day she died, over 150 years ago. Somewhere on the shores of the Sea of Sorrows, a little girl might wash ashore, cold and wet, in search of a home, a family, and a bite to eat . . .

Little Girl Lost

The last light of the sunset was sifting down through the elm and maple trees surrounding the countryside inn known as “C’est Si Bon.” As she opened her coffin, Merilee noted that her ghouls had already finished the modifications on her new doll and were now working on the pit traps.¹ She moved to the doll collection being tended by a more experienced ghoul and sent her bat to catch up on its sleep.² Allowing the tiny creature to enter

¹ Merilee is capable of commanding undead as a Mature vampire; up to 88 hit dice of them at one time. She prefers ghouls for their reproductive ability and relatively high intelligence, assigning them many tasks that she has a hard time performing herself for lack of size, stature and strength. She has developed a system for maximizing their limited intelligence, such that ghouls in her command fight with excellent teamwork and coordination. Treat her ghouls as very intelligent trained animals for an idea of what they are capable of.

² Merilee’s sentinel bat is a baby bat that is nearly identical to the underdeveloped form that she takes. Merilee can see

her coffin as she exited it, Merilee called over her newest ghoul, and bid him bury the simple wooden box. Between stitches in her newest doll’s dress, she watched carefully as he left just enough room for her to enter the coffin as mist. He would do well, as would the other fishermen who had found her on the beach yesterday morning. Their blood now warmed her body,³ just as their corpses served her purposes. After all, they *had* offered to help . . .

With everyone in their positions, she gave them a quick mental lecture on the price of failure,⁴ and then prepared for her part. The annoyance of lacking a reflection to check her appearance failed to bother Merilee, for she would merely be going for the scared and ragged look tonight. Just for effect, she had the ghouls start back about another thirty feet, so that she had to run through the mud and brambles before starting up the hill.



“There’s at least four out here!”

Gest Banniker pulled his musket off the wall and moved toward the window. Unlike most of the other residents of Dementlieu, the finely-muscled innkeeper was familiar with ghouls, those carrion-feeding wretches that walked the fields and byways of the homeland he had

through its eyes, making it an excellent spy, but it is also a liability in combat. Merilee has trained the bat to move quietly and hide from observers. Should the bat be engaged in combat, consult the *RAVENLOFT MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM I & II* for statistics, under Bat, Ravenloft.

³ “Waste not, want not” is a philosophy Merilee follows quite well. She often allows her ghouls to feast on those she has drained of blood to prevent them becoming vampires. Other times she will drink a little from a paralyzed victim before the ghouls convert the unfortunate into one of them.

⁴ Merilee enforces strict discipline. Knowing that the main liability of her more intelligent servants is their insatiable hunger, she makes it abundantly clear that any ghoul who even “tastes” a victim without her say-so is going to become the main course at the next available opportunity. She enforces this rule strictly, and has a remarkably disciplined cadre of ghouls.

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left years ago. And unlike the pathetic sops who dwelt in the lands of Necropolis, Gest wasn't afraid to challenge the dead for the lands of the living. While the majority of his guests began to panic, Banniker was going into action.

His musket took down one flesh-eater, and just as he expected, the remainder paused to snack before continuing toward the house.⁵ On his signal, Jean d'Uarde took careful aim and fired his belt pistol, maiming one of the creatures. The rest continued their feast as the musket fired again, felling another. With two down and two distracted, Banniker handed the musket to his steward, Janus, and headed out with an axe.

Crossing the room toward the door, he was called back by the cry of Elbert Blethins, up on the stairway. "Where'd that girl come from?!"

Sure enough, Gest tore open the door to see a little girl running, stumbling up the hill, pursued by two more ghouls. She was screaming for help as she ran, nearly out of breath, to the high fence where his dogs were kept. Excited by the prospect of fresh meat, the nearer ghouls dropped their grisly feast and moved in again.

Banniker tore open the gate and called his dogs back with a word, then pulled the hysterical girl inside. The gate was slammed shut and Gest waited for the ghoul following her until it was clawing at the gate. It was halfway over when Gest beheaded it and kicked the body back. Each ghoul that came to dine on their fallen comrade received the same treatment, until four corpses lay by his fence. He hadn't intended for them to get so close, but as it was, the bodies would simply have to be dragged away from the house before burning.

The bodies were burned in the woods that night, and, as Banniker had predicted, no others arrived afterward. By that time the fire was lit, the belated dinner was on the table, and the guests had dismissed their encounter as a curiosity altogether, except, of course, for the girl. Her name, once she gave it, was Elizabeth Ann Farmington,⁶ and she was from Mordentshire. Every effort to get her to eat was rebuffed,⁷ and she kept mumbling about her daddy. The sight was nearly enough to drive the men to tears, for they had all seen her break into hysterics at the sight of one of the bodies, the freshest ghoul there. Her father's fate was obvious, but still she continued to cry for him.

⁵ At certain times when her ghouls are supposed to act as "normal" ghouls, Merilee releases her hold on them and they return to their natural tendencies. In such cases they are indistinguishable from "normal" ghouls, at least by behavior.

⁶ Merilee has many aliases that she goes by, but the most common are Elizabeth Ann and her pen name, T. LaMark.

⁷ While Merilee can drink, eating has been difficult for her. She has made an art form out of finding excuses to avoid eating. In situations where she feels it necessary, she may be able to hold down solid food for 1d10 minutes.

"I think she must be in shock, poor thing," mumbled Lysha Paddington, a young woman from Falkovnia with a child of her own.

"Absolutely," agreed Myrta Blethins, the bossy matron from Mordent. "We mustn't do anything to upset her."⁸

"Well, from the few questions she answered, she's probably not near family,"⁹ Jean noted.

"Well, we can't help her much tonight. She can sleep in our room," said Myrta, "and tomorrow we'll take her into town to see if anyone there can help her."

All present murmured their assent around the table,¹⁰ though Gest and Janus exchanged looks at the thought of someone volunteering C'est Si Bon for a charity case. Speculation continued about where the ghouls must have come from—obviously some group of the slaving beast had wandered away from the Necropolitan border. Such things certainly didn't come from Dementlieu.

Gest and Janus retired from the table shortly after the halfling cook had served dessert. Their business took them into Janus' office, where, with nobody to hear them,¹¹ he related the latest reports of their assets to his master.

⁸ According to the *DUNGEON MASTER Guide*, vampires can give mental commands to their charmed victims without using any sort of vocal signal. Merilee uses this ability to carefully plant words in people that are not out of character, but are what she wants them to say. Unless the remark is truly out of character or uses knowledge the victim didn't have access to, most people will not even notice anything unusual, even when it happens to them.

⁹ Merilee will often play a distraught child, giving only vague details of her situation and counting on those who hear to make assumptions, which they often do. This allows her to build extremely believable lies.

¹⁰ Unlike a normal *charm*, which creates feelings of strong friendship, Merilee's powerful charm attaches to memories of childhood, parenthood, and innocence, such that her victims often see her as one of their own children, or perhaps a little sibling. For this reason, while her victims may not die for her if she asks, most would sacrifice themselves for Merilee if she is threatened.

Saves against Merilee's *charm* ability are at the standard -2 for vampiric charm, with an additional -2 penalty for Merilee's apparent innocence. Additionally, the DM may wish to add penalties for those with strong parental feelings, or remove Merilee's bonus for those who are more familiar with her vampiric nature.

¹¹ One of the uses of gaseous form is that while one is spread out so thin as to be effectively invisible, senses are extended throughout, allowing for monitoring in multiple rooms of a house, for example. Extension of the gaseous form requires heavy concentration, however; only one conversation can be monitored at any time. In addition, extending the gaseous form is at the normal rate for gaseous form movement. Combined with the daytime excursions of a sentinel bat, no secret is safe from Merilee for long.

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“Well, I had my doubts about this new arrangement—” Janus began.

“Which you have already expressed. I told you, we’ve had no reports from the rest of the Kargat, and in such situations I am left to my discretion.”

Janus, not as young as he used to be and never one for confrontation, raised his hands in placating gesture and nodded his agreement.

“Of course, I was only saying—” Janus noted his employer’s grim demeanor and changed the subject. “I’ll need to recharge your ring soon, master.”

It wasn’t the change in subject that adjusted Gest’s mood for the better. It was that word, “master,” that did it. Janus was a sniveling little wizard who had accepted lycanthropy to cure his typhoid seven years ago, and along with that gift had come indenture to Gest. Gest would never let Janus forget that it was *he*, not Janus, who spoke for and represented the Kargat.

“Not while the husband and wife are here,” he murmured. “Jean and Lysha are bound to keep what secrets they learn of us to themselves, lest we alert the authorities to their location.”

Janus made a note in his book after a momentary hesitation.

“Oh, yes,” he said, something in the book catching his attention, “Lysha hasn’t paid us the extra amount that you demanded for not revealing her child’s half-elven nature.” He paused at this, with an expectant look at Gest.

“She claims that she has nothing else to pay with,” Gest agreed. “Have Coinfumble go through her belongings tomorrow while cleaning, and see if that’s true. If so, perhaps I can make arrangements for an alternative form of payment.”

Janus wanted to comment that the woman was married, and would object to the form of payment that Gest usually asked women for, but then, he knew what the response would be: She was a refugee, hiding here with nobody to help her. Fleeing from Falkovnia, the woman had probably had to “pay” some soldier in a similar manner to get here in the first place. Even then, they didn’t even know that her story was true; perhaps she had made up her marriage to an elven man to avoid Jean’s advances. Such marriages were certainly rare enough, especially in Falkovnia.

The two finished the remainder of their business in silence and Banniker headed back to the dining room. There he found his guests looking around for Elizabeth, who was subsequently found outside,¹² staring at the line

¹² Another advantage of gaseous form is that when dispersed through multiple rooms of a house or other area, Merilee can choose to “regroup” at any point. The cost of this is that it takes *at least* twice as long for Merilee to disperse and regroup as it would take to travel somewhere in gaseous form. The

of thick, black smoke streaming from the nearby woods. Clicking her tongue in motherly fashion, with a glance at the other folk who stood staring at this poignant sight, Myrta Blevins took the girl under her arm and led her away from thoughts of her lost father.¹³



The “kiss goodnight” Merilee had given to Elbert and Myrta contained enough soporific¹⁴ to deepen their sleep while she fed, turned to mist, and left to do her work. Not wanting to leave them too weak, she resisted sating her full desire for blood in their room, choosing instead to take a visit to Lysha and her little boy, Sardion.¹⁵ Apparently Lysha was disguising Sardion’s identity by having him appear sick—a ruse familiar to Merilee. Dipping a finger into the vial of powerful soporific that had been concealed inside her doll,¹⁶

advantage is that it allows her to find an out-of-the-way area and claim to have been there all the time.

¹³ Merilee will often pretend to be a traumatized child in some way or another, as this is a ready explanation for her coldness, “anemia,” inability to eat, and need to sleep at strange times. Even more, this allows her room to make strange requests and actions without them seeming “out of character” for a child. Finally, this prevents extensive probing into her background. “Rescuers” are far more likely to try to keep her mind off her apparent troubles than dredge up bad memories.

¹⁴ With decades to dedicate to her craft, Merilee has become an accomplished herbalist and poisoner. She can create extremely potent sleep poisons, and she often coats her lips with them before an innocent-seeming kiss goodnight. The onset time is slowed by the fact it is a contact poison, but this is offset by the fact that the blood vessels of the head and neck promote rapid circulation. In essence, victims of this poison must save vs. poison or fall asleep within 4-11(1d8+3) minutes. If Merilee is using this before feeding, as she often does, this poison merely adds a -4 to the save vs. poison that must be made in order to awake during feeding (see *Van Richten’s Guide to Vampires*, pg. 58). As always, a failed save means she can feed at leisure while the victim sleeps.

¹⁵ As a Mature vampire, Merilee *would* require 11 hp of blood per day. With her “childlike” appetite, however, this is lowered to 6. Her incredible discipline and willpower allow her to take tiny amounts from a number of sources. By far, her favorite victims are children like herself, but she feeds from them rarely because of the frequency of death. Even a nonfatal feeding will often make a child so weak so as to be bedridden for a day. Only Merilee’s discipline keeps her from killing the children she feeds from.

¹⁶ Below are standard contents for a small doll (usually a soft rag doll, sometimes wood) or a large doll (usually wood and cloth, sometimes ceramic). Merilee uses these dolls to conceal whatever would be “out of character” for an innocent little girl.

Small Doll: 2 poisoned darts, small vial of poison, 2d4 gp.

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Merilee carefully sedated the pair with a drop on their skin before feeding. Merilee relished the taste of child's blood, knowing that Lysha would not be able to tell anyone anything even if she thought something was amiss—after all, Sardion was *supposed* to be sick.

Having fed sparingly on four people, Merilee could now put her mind to her task. Between what she had seen through her sentinel bat over the past few days, and what she had heard while gaseous, Gest had been quite busy. Rumors from Necropolis held that he had been attacked by a rival in the Kargat who knew of his lycanthropy, using both silver and wolfsbane, but these attacks had proven ineffective. Still, she wanted to verify this for herself. During the past week, her sentinel bat had observed Gest's careful avoidance of silver, to the point that he let Janus actually handle the coins whenever money changed hands. Merilee suspected this was feigned, but she would find out soon enough.

Reassuming gaseous form, she slipped silently downstairs to the kitchen, noting the doorway to the back rooms where Misra Coinfumble slept. Eavesdropping had confirmed rumors that the halfling thief had been captured and infected by Gest after she botched picking his pocket in Martira Bay. He had forced her to assume her current surname as a constant reminder to the little thief whose pride needed no reminders. Misra was too cowardly to directly oppose her master and not clever enough to come up with an indirect form of combat, but still Merilee knew that with some help, the little thief could get her revenge.

Stowing the information away for later, Merilee clambered up on the halfling's ladder and took a look through cupboards, making a mental inventory¹⁷ of all the spices they had—or didn't. The halfling cook was the reason they had named their inn "It's So Good" in Dementlieur, but her skill in the culinary arts could prove a liability if her well-stocked stores were conspicuously lacking any spices. Of the few things missing, one stood out, backing up Merilee's suspicions about Gest. Just before climbing back down, Merilee took a second look at the anise, which had been far in the back, covered in dust. The thought struck her again that she was on to something.

Once again, she stowed the knowledge away for later. For now she would make certain Gest wasn't

simply a werewolf. She pulled out a cloth bag from inside her doll and looked around for Coinfumble's breakfast recipes. Adding tiny amounts of finely ground wolfsbane to the ingredients of several breakfast dishes, she took her time mixing in the powder so it would never be noticed, not even by a halfling connoisseur. Then she tucked the bag back inside her doll, turned into mist, and flowed into the woods to talk to her lackeys.

Merilee liked ghoul and human assistants for various reasons. Humans had the skills and the creativity to be very helpful, if they could be manipulated. Ghouls, on the other hand, could be refreshing to work with, if such a term could be used about the reeking, rotten corpses she ordered around. Undoubtedly, they *could* be a refreshment compared to humans, for one simple quality—they did as they were told.

Indeed, her sentinel bat was being well cared for, the pit traps had been dug all around the area, and her second coffin had been delivered, along with four more ghouls to carry it. Not bad, considering that she only had two ghouls left after the assault on the inn. She had decided to call four more ghouls and another coffin from Chateaufaux,¹⁸ rather than turn the rest of the C'est Si Bon's guests into replacement ghouls. Not only would the psychological effect of being attacked by them be lost on a killer like Banniker, but all five guests would be more useful in other capacities—for now . . .

Merilee turned her thoughts to the wolfsbane, plus the silver mace and dagger that lay in her coffin. She had always doubted their effectiveness as weapons, but now she had more confidence in an alternative role. Stowing them in the bag, she shifted to gaseous form and returned to the inn.

Minutes later, Merilee was back in the woods with Jean's bullet molds and several silver and copper coins. Making bullets was tedious work, and now she had time to reflect on the evidence she had gathered. She had no doubt now that Gest was no werewolf. His strong body odor was the final clue, as distinctive as it was. His avoidance of coins was not feigned, however. A heavy dose of the sleep drug had allowed her to test Banniker's skin for an allergy, and the rash should be gone by the end of the night for sure. She could have killed him tonight, but now she was confident that she could use this

Large Doll: All of the above, plus *one* of the following: 10 charges of gunpowder, small firearm, 1d4 vials of poison, signal mirror, map/document.

¹⁷ Merilee's memory is so excellent she can recite entire books from memory with only a few minor errors. She believes that this feature is a side effect of being transformed as a child; her brain was in a state of development that should have come to a close in adulthood. Instead, her mind continued to grow at the rapid rate of a child's over the decades. This may also explain her high Intelligence and Wisdom scores.

¹⁸ Considering that she destroyed Keesla while the two were traveling, and knowing the difficulties in traveling as a vampire, Merilee takes a lot of precautions. First, at any time, she has at *least* three coffins or other such areas for sleep. A day's travel behind her, you will find her underlings digging up her last coffin and preparing to ship it to another location. When she knows where she is headed next, she always has a coffin buried somewhere in the area at least three days in advance, and there are always servants watching it. Thus, there is always one coffin in front, one behind, and one where she is currently staying.

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weakness to his disadvantage at any time, and get a much better payoff.

Her biggest curiosities now were the ring Gest wore—which apparently protected him from her charm ability—and how well he controlled his bloodlust. The ring must have been a gift from the Kargat for his assignment to the area. That would have to be dealt with. From her examination of Janus' notes, the mind shielding effect was constant, but the ring could also be enchanted with the ability to detect charms. From what she had seen, Gest used it on everyone when they first arrived, which would prevent him from catching on to her actions. He doubted that he even used it on her when she arrived, but even so, it obvious why the Living Brain had selected her for this job.¹⁹

She carefully showed the ghouls how to use the bullet mold, woke her sentinel bat, and slipped back to C'est Si Bon. There was a long day coming, and she needed to practice to be ready for her part.



"Look at her; she must have been so exhausted," Myrta Blethins whispered to her husband. "I wonder if she'll eat anything this morning." She nudged the tiny girl awake, the little grey eyes blinking as Elizabeth looked back at the grandmotherly woman.

"Breakfast is ready!"

Elbert stood behind them, waiting patiently as his wife did what she loved best. Once the girl was fully awake,²⁰ the three of them headed downstairs. Elizabeth stayed away from windows, still sluggish, and excused herself quickly halfway through breakfast. She took a plate of Coinfumble's wonderful pancakes and sausage to her room, saying she still wanted to sleep. Nestling down

¹⁹ Merilee sells her services to many of Ravenloft's villains and darklords. She is a very professional person who usually does more than she is asked and requests small favors in return. Her immunity to mind control, poison, and death magic make her available as an agent for/against Dominic d'Honaire, the Living Brain, the lords of Borca, Ghastria, or even Strahd himself. While she does not take on fool's errands, it is possible to use her as a servant of just about any villain in a given campaign. (Note that this does not mean that she will back both sides of a conflict. Merilee will usually side with one or the other, to prevent unfortunate misunderstandings.)

²⁰ Like other vampires who can be awakened during the day, Merilee suffers some disorientation that is usually passed off as grogginess. There is a full minute where she can take no action, and another 1d4 where she can not use shapechanging or gaseous form. If awakened by someone who thinks her mortal, however, she will often feign sleep (deliberately breathing in and out, etc.) and then feign some grogginess at the appropriate time.

in her blankets just beneath the window,²¹ Elizabeth hugged her doll all the tighter, and fell asleep again.

As planned, Myrta and Elbert prepared to take the girl into town. She went along willingly, even cheerily, and once outside in the midmorning sun, she even ran ahead, skipping down the path into the copse of trees ahead of them. She loved riding with Elbert and Myrta in the cab, her cold fingers wrapped around the old woman's as if they were mother and child. However, no sooner were they around the first bend from the inn than Merilee began to be sick, running to the bushes to throw up.

"I better go back," she told them after a moment.²²

After a momentary disagreement, Myrta agreed that they could ask around in town on her behalf just as easily without her. Elbert began to turn the carriage around, but Elizabeth was already walking back to C'est Si Bon on the road, so they kept going as they had. No sooner were they out of sight but she dissolved into mist and floated into the shady woods.



Safe in her coffin, Merilee could continue to keep tabs on the humans through her sentinel bat, which awakened her every few hours to report. Lysha's belongings had been searched, revealing the silver weapons that Lysha had no idea were there. With a little prompting from Merilee, Jean was on hand to confess that the weapons were his.²³ Once he was alone with Lysha,

²¹ As a Mature vampire, Merilee can tolerate one minute in the sun without taking damage, assuming she makes the initial save vs. petrification required to enter it (see footnote #26). She has refined a talent for looking like she's in sunlight, when she's not. A common trick is to be seen at morning or evening, in the long shadow of the setting or rising sun, even walking through it briefly, but keeping contact to a minimum. As long as she has a doll (see footnote #27), she can even sleep in such a situation, at least until the shadow moves.

²² One of the greatest annoyances about being considered a child is that somebody is always watching you. Where other vampires can go off alone, Merilee is often followed or guarded by those concerned with her safety. While she could order charmed protectors to leave her alone, this would certainly alert them to something strange the moment the charm wears off. To avoid embarrassment, then, Merilee often uses elaborate ruses such as the one in this example.

²³ Merilee often coordinates the telepathic charm power mentioned in footnote #9 with the spying actions of her sentinel bat. This allows her to bypass the normal weakness of vampiric control, which is that a charmed servitor outside of the vampire's senses cannot be given instructions how to react to a new situation. This also allows her to direct her ghouls strategically from afar, by using her bat as a spy. Note that if she is asleep, the bat will only wake her up to do this in an obvious emergency, or at a prearranged event. Also note that

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Jean confessed that he had lied to protect her, which to him seemed a perfectly suitable reason for his actions. Of course, without the clueless couple there, Gest was able to confront Lysha with her lack of payment, and Jean quickly offered the silver weapons in exchange.

Jean and Lysha were both confused about the disappearance of Jean's bullet mold and the arrival of the weapons, but neither one wished to tell the truth to Gest, so Merilee's plan was working fine. Janus told Gest about the missing money, and Gest immediately suspected Jean, which was also expected. Gest would now believe that the silver weapons had been hidden in Lysha's room to avoid detection of some plot against him. These clues could not have worked out better.

Merilee was much more interested in the Blethins, so she sent her bat out to follow them after all was working fine inside the inn. She would have to time her arrival with that of the Blethins, which probably meant delaying them. Six hours later, the bat woke her up to report that they were buying things in town. It only took a mental nudge to get Myrta Blethins to buy her a new, larger doll. Buying the fennel would be pushing it, so she had the bat make a quick sweep of the market for a few minutes, and then told it to head back to C'est Si Bon.

The bat woke her up just as the Blethins were coming up the path. The sun was still setting; it would be tough to manage the switch, but easier than this morning had been. Gritting her teeth,²⁴ she turned into a bat and flew ahead of them, into the second story, and turned into mist to get inside.



"But wasn't she with you?!" Gest demanded. Even bossy Myrta shrank a little from this outburst; Gest was in a foul mood.

"I was upstairs," came a weak voice from above them. Coming downstairs was Elizabeth, groggy and rubbing her eyes. "I saw that Misra was cleaning our room when I came back, so I picked another. Am I in trouble?"²⁵

with her incredible powers of insight and attention to planning, Merilee will have the bat prepared for most situations.

²⁴ Merilee's exceptional wisdom gives her a bonus against many saves that vampires make, including the saves to see if she is repelled by sunlight, mirrors, or holy symbols. (See *Van Richten's Guide to Vampires*, pg. 41, 42, and 48.)

²⁵ These statements are excellent examples of Merilee's tactics for non-*charm* manipulation. The first is a replay of footnote #10; letting people assume more to her statements than she has said. Everyone in hearing will assume she has been in a room they were not in, and that somebody else was aware of it. By not stating a specific room, Merilee has side-stepped any confrontation that might arise by being caught in a lie. The second is another great line, one that Merilee has used to get out of trouble for over a century. Most conflicts that are centered

Banniker shook his head and headed off to hurry Coinfumble along, while Elbert and Myrta swarmed all over the worried child, showing her all the wonderful things they had got her in town. Most of all, she loved the new doll they had bought her, with the porcelain features and hands. It was a very nice one, and they could tell she liked dolls by the way she always clung to her cloth one.²⁶

Coinfumble had been saving food for all three of them, so it was easy enough to just go to their room and gossip about town. The girl was getting chatty now, and they got to their room just as the sun was setting outside the window. Elizabeth was the first one there, but as they were just settling down, Elizabeth jumped back up to say she had forgotten her other doll where she had been sleeping. Taking her plate with her, she ventured briefly into the other room.

"Well, deary, 'tis good to see you've got your appetite back." Elbert offered, noting that her plate was now half empty. Elizabeth only smiled shyly.

They continued their conversation, with Elizabeth getting so worked up that she could hardly concentrate on eating. Rather than talk about her, which they feared might upset her, the two adults decided to tell her stories, and found she had quite a few of her own. They continued telling stories long into the evening, before going to bed.



This time around, the soporific was only being used to prevent the older couple from waking up. They were wearing out Merilee's patience and their usefulness, so tonight she would be feeding from Jean, Coinfumble, and Janus. Taking her larger doll, Merilee turned into mist and flowed into Jean's room. There, after feeding, she quickly searched through his things for something she would need for the next phase of her operation.

To reach all her goals in one night, Merilee would need wings. Taking the bag she had used the night

around her but do not actually accuse her of wrongdoing can be defused with this question.

²⁶ Merilee, like all of her kind, requires some relic of her former life to sleep with. In her case, this is a doll. Merilee always sleeps with a doll of some kind, although it needn't be one she owned in life—those have all gone the way of all the earth. Yet, as much as she despises her childlike appearance, her condition forces her to acquire or make a new doll every few years. She has a small collection of dolls saved up, so as not to be without one should she be forced to find new refuge. One advantage of this is that a little girl with a doll collection is far less conspicuous than a man who ships barrels of earth wherever he goes. Another is that in a pinch, there are bound to be dolls in every village she goes to, making it easy for her to find quick and easy refuge.

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before, she turned into a bat and flew into town, to the home of a dye-seller she had seen earlier. Fennel was used for yellow and brown dyes, and between the garden and the exterior storerooms, she managed to collect quite a bit. Dropping this off at her ghouls' camp, she gave them instructions on how it was to be used, then headed back into the inn.

Waking Jean was quite easy, but keeping him awake was difficult. Knowing he was curious about somebody stealing and planting things, Merilee deliberately made some noises in the hall outside his room, and then outside his window. Finally, Jean got dressed and crept outside.

By the time Jean was outside investigating the window, Merilee had turned back into gaseous form and was inside, at Janus' bedside. She woke the old man, using her already-present charm powers as she told him that she couldn't sleep.

"That's no surprise," the old man huffed, getting out of bed. "You have done nothing but sleep all day!"

Getting him into the study was easy after that. Had he been fully awake, he might have noticed there was something strange about her request to get a book on the uppermost shelf—something deliberate. Had he not been charmed, he might have refused to get up on his tiptoes and reach for the book she asked for—a simple accounting book, as he had insisted. Had he a mirror and been able to see her reflection in it, he might have had a warning as she opened the back of her porcelain doll, pulled out a wheellock belt pistol, and held it towards the back of his head with both hands.²⁷

The shot woke everyone not already awake. With only moments to act, Merilee dropped the pistol to the floor and drained the last of the wizard's life force with a blow from her fist. Her mist was dissipating throughout the room as Coinfumble arrived, followed by Jean, then Gest, then Lysha, then Myrta and Elbert, the last two still obviously searching for the missing girl. Merilee observed the argument with enthusiasm.

It was, of course, Jean's gun, and he had been the only one not in his room. Jean immediately began accusing Gest, talking about somebody stealing from him, which Gest naturally took as an attempt to relocate the blame. Even more interesting was observing the actions of Gest and Coinfumble at the sight of blood. Coinfumble immediately excused herself, which Merilee decided must have been a preemptive attempt to avoid going into bloodlust. Gest, being a true lycanthrope,

exercised more restraint, but between his rage and the sight of blood, the amount of restraint was visible.

Merilee decided that the argument could only escalate properly if the older couple were out of the way, so she decided to remove them. Slipping out of the room in mist form, Merilee ran around to the window where Lysha noticed her, which sent Elbert and Myrta outside immediately after her. Knowing that she had to get back and watch the show so that she could direct Jean properly, Merilee ran sobbing into the woods, followed by the Blethins. Moments later, she was better fed and had two more ghouls. The Blethins had served their purpose.

Returning to the inn, Merilee was just in time to make Jean run for his life. Gest's assumptions were that Jean had been sent here to kill him; the discovery that Janus was slain with a silver bullet only confirmed that supposition.²⁸ Lysha was sobbing and frantic, not understanding any of what was happening. A brief mental nudge sent Lysha running to her room, where she simply held Sardion and waited for all this to stop.

It would soon be over, Merilee judged. With Lysha in her room, Jean running, Coinfumble ready to change and Gest angry, Banniker would go for a hunt. Sure enough, soon he was letting out his dogs after Jean, who by now had reached the woods and was still running. She turned into a bat to intercept Jean before he got too far, all the while giving her ghouls a strict mental command to hold back. She didn't want Jean killed while he was still useful.

It was the odor of the dogs that first tipped her off, Merilee decided. Even bred with wolves and hounds as they were, the strong smell of jackal was still in them, as it was in Gest, whose strong body odor was her final clue. The avoidance of anise, which tasted like fennel, only emphasized the fact that the common household herb was missing. As he ran into the woods after Jean, a man-jackal hybrid at the head of a pack of wolf-jackal hybrids, Merilee saw how easily he could have been mistaken for a werewolf by a non-lycanthrope.

Jean stopped and stared at her as she coalesced into solid form in front of him.

"What are you?" he breathed, his voice shuddering as the howls broke from the hilltops behind him.

"I am a ghost," Merilee lied. "I was slain years ago by this beast, and I have come for my revenge. Gest Banniker is my murderer, and I desire justice."

²⁷ Merilee has used firearms before, but with her tiny, weak hands she requires a two-handed grip on the smallest of such weapons, and the kick they put out is prohibitive to frequent use. They often go flying completely out of her hands. Larger firearms are only useful if she can steady them on something else. When used, however, Merilee's high Dexterity makes her an adequate shot.

²⁸ It is common practice for Merilee to have a scapegoat for her actions. If feeding, she may bruise her own neck and pretend to be a victim, then charm somebody to make them impersonate a vampire. When investigating, Merilee will often try to make her scapegoat appear capable but incorrect on many points. This prevents immediate elimination of the scapegoat and lulls the victim into a false sense of security.

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Jean had a hundred questions, she knew, about why she had appeared the way she had, and about her actions the past few days. With the pack hot on his trail, however, he only had time for the one that mattered:

“How can I help?”

Merilee told her two newest ghouls to hide, knowing that Jean would have too many questions about Myrta and Elbert. She introduced him to the rest as other former victims of Gest before telling him what to do.

Gest crashed through the brush on the trail of this foolish prey who thought he could be slain with silver. Well, let him shoot Gest with silver bullets all night. Were it not for the murder of Janus, he might have let the man live to spread misinformation. Then again, maybe not; it had been too long since he had had a decent hunt, and the exhilaration was compelling.

The trail was pitifully straight, and the dogs closed in quickly. Suddenly a small figure crouched on a fallen tree in front of them. With a start, the figure jumped forward and smacked his lead dog, killing it. Within the moments it took for Gest to arrive on the scene, half his pack was dead. In shock and fury, Gest let out a roar that tore through the woods like thunder.

“Whoops, was that one a cousin?” a gentle voice purred mockingly. Gest stared at the figure that stood boldly amid his cowering dogs. Coinfumble? No, she was too slim. His eyes and mindset finally adjusted as he was pulled out of the heady reverie of the hunt. This was someone else.

“Don’t recognize me?” Merilee said, a little louder this time as she stepped up to face Gest. She chose her words carefully, so as to mean different things to Gest and Jean. His bestial eyes only registered confusion. This was the girl, Elizabeth. What in the Mists was going on? Then he remembered a Kargat meeting from decades back. Mention of a child vampire who was associated with the Kargat, made dealings with them. He had even met her, but she had looked so plain . . .

“Betrayer!” he roared, his mind still on the hunt, his rage needing no explanation for why the child vampire would strike against a Kargat agent. Merilee backed up to the fallen tree and held her ground there as she watched him surge forward, preparing a strike of her own with just the right timing.

Merilee’s head blew apart into clouds of mist as Jean fired straight through her, hitting the werejackal with a ball of solid copper. Gest was knocked back, giving Merilee the instant that she needed. Her hands shot to his furry gut, draining his life away as he staggered back, roaring with a pain that he felt so rarely it was unreal to him even now. Gest’s counterattack was furious, but it ended as Merilee turned to mist²⁹ and drifted back under

²⁹ With only 18 hp, Merilee often attacks for a round by surprise and then is turning to mist by the time her opponents

the log. Jean fired again, hitting the monstrous beast in the head as he tried to climb over after Merilee. The pain was maddening now, and Gest came on in spite of a nagging doubt that he should not continue his pursuit. Jean backed up and, taking his pistol from the ghouls who had been reloading it, fired again. Another pistol ready, and he fired again. With all this going on, the constant barrage of copper bullets tearing into him, Gest never noticed the dart that penetrated his flesh.³⁰ It was not enchanted, and so caused no pain, but it was poisoned in a special fashion.³¹ With or without this final stroke from Merilee, Gest was near death.

“Stop.” Merilee said to Jean, adding emphasis through her charm.

Jean ceased firing and smiled at the wrecked, heaving heap that had been Gest Banniker. The ghouls moved in and paralyzed the fallen creature, though to Jean it looked as if they had merely finished him off, as Gest had already ceased to move. As the ghouls dragged Gest into the brush, Merilee turned.

“Thank you Jean; we’ve had our justice, with your help. Go check on Lysha.”

With Jean gone, Merilee turned back to her ghouls, who were, as per her orders, burying the paralyzed Gest up to his neck. The fennel had proved unnecessary till now, but it might still be useful for interrogating the werebeast. Before the ghouls began to bury Gest, Merilee looked him in the eyes.

“Change,” she ordered.

Obediently, Gest changed back to a human, still unable to move. Ignoring that the transformation had allowed Gest to heal some of his wounds, Merilee leaned into the pit and removed his magical ring. With a mental note for her ghouls to proceed, Merilee slipped the ring inside her brand-new doll and began packing to leave.

“I can get out of here, girl,” Gest spat at her minutes later, as the paralysis wore off. It was an empty threat, and they both knew it.

are attacking. Most attackers cannot do 18 hp in two rounds, leaving her to regenerate as mist and then continue the assault. By using her mist form this way, Merilee can wear down high-level parties, by causing them to waste powerful magic as she waits out the duration of the spells.

³⁰ Merilee uses poisoned darts in combat against anyone who she desires an edge against. Unlike many other opponents, Merilee has *no* compunctions about overreacting and/or “cheating” in her combat tactics. She has even been known to coat her nails in contact poison (no need to worry about what it might do to her, after all).

³¹ Whether this poison actually worked on Gest is up to the DM, but it is catalytic: if ingested or injected 5-30 minutes before a paralyzing touch, it lowers the save by 5. This is *not* cumulative.

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“Not before I can bash in your head and steal what’s left of your life, you can’t. And don’t call me ‘girl,’” she responded.

“Why?” he asked hoarsely. “Why have you betrayed the Kargat?”

“First, I might as well tell you that the Kargat aren’t in charge anymore. Second, I never worked for them alone. I was merely an associate, not a lackey.³² I’m here on different business.”

Gest’s answers were forthcoming as she interrogated him about what he knew of the Living Brain and Dominic d’Honaire. She was amused to discover that he had offended Aubrecker without knowledge of his existence; he had been trying to track d’Honaire’s agents, thinking him the only such influence on the people of Dementlieu.

“Well,” she stated, “when the sun comes up, two things are going to happen. One, I’m getting into my coffin, which will be moved away by my ghouls. Two, you are going to get a visitor by the name of Alexis Wilhaven. He’s very interested in ‘investing’ in you and your business.”

Oblivious to his screams, the ghouls tamped the earth down around Gest and took turns watching over him until sunrise. The last two to leave, who he recognized, were placed as guards as the other six marched off into the woods with Merilee’s coffin.



“He’ll be an excellent ally, Merilee.” It was Alexis Wilhaven who spoke, and it was the body of Alexis Wilhaven that sat with Merilee in *C’est Si Bon* that evening. But the words slipping from Alexis’ mouth came directly from Rudolph van Aubrecker, the Living Brain. Coinfumble and Gest were ever the gracious hosts, but Lysha and Jean had fled the madness of the inn forever. There was little worry of either coming back, as they were both refugees of sorts who would have reasons to hide their presence here. Add to that Jean’s belief that he had helped avenge an age-old murder, and the truth of what happened here tonight would soon be shrouded in fireside tales of tragic justice.

“I thought as much,” purred the girl-vampire as she reclined on the sofa. “He only needed a little taming.” Ever the gentleman, Aubrecker had brought her a bottle of fresh blood, warmed by the fire for her enjoyment.

³² Merilee exaggerates on this point; she has been studying Adam and his children—and golems in general—for years, and she offered that information to the Kargat in exchange for a couple of favors years ago. She maintains a good relationship with a few members of the Kargat after the Requiem, but she has nothing resembling membership. She acquired these contacts after the last Kargat vampire who tried to study Adam never came back; Merilee sometimes wears his ring.

Coinfumble refilled her glass mutely and left the room again.

It took a little while for Aubrecker to respond; he was unable to read Merilee’s thoughts and had to use the much slower method of reading Alexis’ memories of her words. They were both used to the style of conversation. “And once again, you have outshone your calling. I only asked that he be eliminated. Bringing him alive was excellent work; preserving his reputation here so he could be exploited was even more commendable. As for the ring, I expect you will take that as part of your fee; I have little use for it, and would see it out of my life forever.”

“You’re too kind.” Merilee murmured. Aubrecker continued without acknowledging the comment.

“And for the rest of your fee?”

Merilee pursed her lips briefly while pretending to think.

“Not money, not this time.” She waited for the words to reach him.

“Be wary, lest you ask too much—”

“An alias. I wish for you to prepare an alias I can use in the shipping industry here on the coast. I need to be able to arrange shipments of products up north, and using my charms is getting tedious.”

“Quite simple,” the Living Brain responded. He had created false identities for much of his criminal empire. Another would hardly be difficult.

“Indeed, yet infinitely valuable to me. Too many suspicions are sown when a ten-year old tries to arrange business deals with merchant companies, and when money is revealed, far too many think me an easy mark. It’s abundantly inconvenient.”

“Quite so. It seems we each have our inconveniences, Milady.³³ Will that be all?”

“Well, I’d like a small account created for this new identity. I’ll add to it myself, but if you’d be so generous as to put the rest of what you owe me into this account, you’ll soon have the money back for the Anthrazit brew and Umbral Grey. Oh, and please make the alias an associate of the Lamordian scholar LaMark.”³⁴

³³ Nobody will ever earn Merilee’s respect for treating her as a child, even while she is acting like one. As contradictory as it seems, the more innocent she acts, the more she hates people for believing her ruse. Business associates learn quickly to treat her as an adult.

³⁴ Tempus LaMark is a pseudonym established by Merilee, well known for “his” submissions to scholarly tracts all over the Core. Merilee has carefully built up the story of this traveling sage while using his reputation to gain subscriptions to scholarly journals. LaMark and his essays have given her a chance to stretch her mental boundaries and receive criticism and input from some of the greatest minds in the core. LaMark never writes about anything that might give any hint as to “his” true nature.

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“Done. How is your alter ego doing? I was not expecting to read your excellent essay in the *Lamordian Scholastic Journal* this month, considering your current exploits. Have you somehow found a way to write while flying?”

Merilee caught the joke even as it emerged mirthlessly from Alexis’ lips. “In a sense, yes. My ability to control undead is similar to your unconquerable domination of the wills of men; it has no range. I have a trusted ally in Lamordia who takes dictation from one of my minor undead, a zombie, well preserved to allow it speech. I think the words that I wish to say to the zombie, and my ally writes down every word.”

Merilee could predict his response to this. “You are too trusting. Does not this ally know too much of you? Is he not in a position of great power?” The situation must have maddened Aubrecker, Merilee knew. Here was an action that made no sense from what he knew of Merilee, and his usual recourse—prying open the mind of a person and sifting through—was not possible. Thank goodness for little secrets.

“My ally is trustworthy,³⁵ and would have little to gain by exposing me. He gains experience, wisdom, even

Merilee has even claimed that it was an article written by LaMark that brought Dr. Van Richten close to her, so that she could slay Claudia DeShanes for her knowledge of psionics. As a side note, Merilee writes the name almost exclusively with the first name as an initial. This is a throwback to her invention of the name, which stands for “The Last Markuza.” Merilee has used this self-appointed title only rarely, and those who have heard it (and lived) have wondered if she truly is the last of her family name, or whether she merely suspects it, or whether this is a reference to her immortal nature. Only Merilee really knows.

³⁵ Her “ally” is more than trustworthy, being some of Adam’s former children, the flesh golems of Lamordia. These freaks of unnature have taken Merilee in as a teacher and mentor, for she can teach them something of mortality. She offers them eyes to the outside world, skills such as writing, agriculture, and brewing, and has helped them to build a facade as monks, living in an abandoned monastery. The “monks” fish, grow gardens, brew beer, make clothes, and have entered into exchange with the Lamordians, under Merilee’s careful tutelage.

Merchants deliver food at times, including dried fruits, meats, cheeses, and vegetables. These are either eaten by the flesh golems who require sustenance, fermented into wines and poisons by Merilee (or by flesh golems trained by her), or fed to prisoners who await conversion into flesh golems. Rarer deliveries include cloth, salt, blank books, letters of correspondence from various sources, gunpowder, guns, holy water, and whatever else Merilee has arranged for. The sailors and merchants have strict instructions not to look in the boxes, for the “monks” would be offended.

Naturally, Merilee exploits the golems’ desire to become human, using them for her own purposes. A few of them realize this on a certain level, but they consider her their best chance of

some notoriety as an acquaintance of LaMark. He depends upon his share of our acquisitions as much as I do. In fact, I have another proposal for you.”

“Really?”

“I would like help with a second alias, one with which I can have a more intimate correspondence with you. Contacting me through LaMark requires so much implied meaning in the correspondence, as you know. With a second alias, I might be able to pass on more direct information, even some suggestions and speculations about your current condition.”

The silence was a little long; now it was Merilee’s turn to worry. Alexis’ face was just a mask, never revealing Aubrecker’s thoughts. Without a face to look at, she had no way of telling if she had made the Brain angry or excited. Assuming she had his attention either way, she forged ahead.

“My associate has already penned an essay on how sensory deprivation can cause a person’s brain to develop extraordinary qualities. With the nature of most scholarly journals, however, we have nobody to share the essay with.”

More silence. Merilee knew she was on shaky ground, so she threw out her bait.

“I’ve also prepared another essay from my long association with the, shall we say, lord of the Isle of Lament. It’s on the creation of so-called ‘flesh golems.’ Were you aware of the importance of the brain as an ingredient? Many times the golem retains all the memories and mental stamina of the person whose brain was used. I’d like to discuss the possibilities with somebody, but again, the literary journals just don’t have who I’m looking for.” She knew this would grab him.

“And the price for this information?”

“All that is required to establish this correspondence is to create an alias whereby we can exchange the information. It’s already been written under the name of Herr Fritz Zeitenhab. If you would be so kind as to begin petitioning the library of Leidenheim to begin forwarding those messages to you, I can begin building that alias in Lamordia.”

This time she was sure the silence was on her side. She sat back and took a long drink while letting him think.

The response was simple. “You give much, yet ask little. What little you have is quickly magnified by your exploitation of its values, and then combined with other trifles in like fashion. Yet you have managed to build quite a life around this.”

Merilee smiled, her teeth sparkling red in the firelight as Gest refilled her drink. “It’s a gift, my dear Baron. Truly a gift.”

understanding humanity. They may never realize that it is impossible to learn humanity from the inhuman.

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Further information on Merilee Markuza can be found in the RAVENLOFT accessory *Darklords*.



Merilee Markuza

178-year old Mature Vampire, Neutral Evil

Armor Class	1	Str	5
Movement	6	Dex	15
Level/Hit Dice	4+3	Con	5
Hit Points	18	Int	19
THAC0	15	Wis	19
No. of Attacks	1	Cha	17
Damage/Attack	1d3+level drain		
Special Attacks	<i>Charm</i> , level drain, poison, undead control		
Special Defenses	+1 or better to hit, undead immunities, high Int and Wis		
Special Vulnerabilities	As vampire (see below)		
Magic Resistance	5%		

Languages

Balok, Darkonian, Dementlieur, Mordentish, Ansalonian Common, Nova Vaasan, Valachani, a few others at the Dungeon Master's discretion.

Equipment

Below are standard contents for a small doll (usually a soft rag doll, sometimes wood) or a large doll (usually wood and cloth, sometimes ceramic). Merilee uses these dolls to conceal whatever would be "out of character" for an innocent little girl. In addition to the following, there may be things she is carrying to help her current endeavor.

- ❖ **Small Doll:** 1-2 poisoned darts, small vial of poison, 2d4 gp.
- ❖ **Large Doll:** All of the above, plus *one* of the following: 10 charges of gunpowder, small firearm, 1d4 vials of poison, signal mirror, map/document.

Merilee has most of the standard vampire drawbacks for a vampire of her age; she is not repelled by garlic, but holy symbols, consecrated ground and mirrors repel her normally, while sunlight, holy water, and running water all damage her. A stake through the heart only requires a 13 Strength from the wielder, due to her slight build, but the roll must hit AC -2 because her heart is so small. See the footnotes for small alterations and roleplaying notes on her charm, immunity to sunlight, sleeping requirements, and other aspects of her nature.

CARNAGAN WOLFE

A Wolf Without a Pack

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BIOGRAPHY

S

ometimes, when punishment reaches out to claim the guilty, an innocent is caught in its grip.

Appearance

Carnagan is a unassuming young man who has just turned thirty. Yet, because of his lycanthropic blood, he only appears to be about 23. He stands about 5'10" with a slightly athletic build. His unruly hair is dark black and cut short. His face often has a pensive expression, but if around friends or a person he is attracted to, a slight smile will always touch his lips. He constantly has the beginnings of a mustache and goatee, but they never seem to grow, leaving him with a scruffy look. Many people have assumed that this unassuming figure is helpless, and more than one opponent can attest that Carnagan is much stronger than he looks.

Carnagan's eyes are soft brown and shine with intelligence. Yet, an observant onlooker may see that an almost sorrowful envy flashes in his eyes when he looks upon a sense of a family enjoying each others' company, or a pair of lovers being reunited. He will only become angry if he sees an injustice occurring. He is unable to stand by as a neutral party if someone is being discriminated against. He ignores class, race and other social restrictions, the only things that he has a hatred for are undead and werewolves that prey on innocents.

No part of Carnagan's body carries a scar. He heals much too quickly for them to form. Yet, Carnagan does carry signs of his true nature. He has thick, bushy eyebrows that join over the bridge of his nose. His index and middle fingers are both of equal lengths. Finally, a thin layer of fine black hair covers the palms of his hands. He covers this with black gloves, but always has a imaginative excuse ready, should anyone ever question him about this feature.

Generally, Wolfe wears loose, comfortable clothing. He wears a simple shirt, a small vest and a pair of

trousers. They are generally dark, somber colors, as he disregards style and it is impractical to sneak up on something while wearing bright colors. If he transforms into his hybrid aspect in these clothes, they will tear a little, but most of the damage will be minor.

In combat, Carnagan wears a set of leather armor rigged to fall apart should he transform while wearing it. He wears a special belt around his waist at all times. The belt has a loop to hold his sword, Harbinger, two holsters for his snaplock pistols, and many small pouches to hold his ammunition, *smokepowder* charges, and other goods needed for hunting undead, such as holy water, garlic, etc.

When Carnagan enters his hybrid form, he stands 6'5" tall and becomes extremely muscular. His body is covered in thick black fur and inch-long claws replace his fingernails. The only part of his body that does not change is his eyes. They remain human, a symbol that he is still in control.

In wolf aspect, Carnagan is identical to a dire wolf. As in his hybrid form, he is covered in black fur and his eyes remain human.

Carnagan Wolfe

7th-Level Thief (Monster Hunter)
Mountain Loup-Garou, Chaotic Good

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Armor Class	6 (5)	Str	17 (19)
Movement	12 (15)	Dex	18 (16)
Level/Hit Dice	7	Con	14
Hit Points	36	Int	16
THACO	16	Wis	18
No. of Attacks	1	Cha	10 (0)
Damage/Attacks	By weapon (2d4/1d6/1d6)		
Special Attacks	Surprise		
Special Defenses	Gold or +1 or better weapons needed to hit, heals when he transforms.		
Special Weaknesses	Wolfsbane, gold, alcohol.		
Thief Abilities	PP 55% OL 55% F/RT 20% HS 55% MS 55% DN 15% CW 60% RL 5%		
Dietary Requirement	35		
Weapon Proficiencies:	Snaplock pistol, Long sword, Dagger		
Nonweapon Proficiencies:	Tracking, Reading/Writing, Carpentry, Weaponsmithing, Survival, Transformation*(2/2), Mark of the Beast* (3/3), Power of the Blood* (2/2), Damage Healing* (1/1), Allergen Alcohol* (1/1), Damage Immunity +2* (4/4)		
Languages:	Dementlieur/Mordentish, Balok		

Notes: Scores in parentheses are for Carnagan in hybrid or wolf aspect. Proficiencies marked with an asterisk (*) are found in the Beasts at Heart rules in *The Book of Souls*. More information on the Monster Hunter Kit may be found in the *Champions of the Mists* accessory.

Background

Carnagan Wolfe's parents hailed from the distant world of Toril. They were loup-garou, and the Mists of Ravenloft embraced them after they had completed the slaughter of the residents of a small farm.

Carnagan was born soon afterward, and was the only pup in the litter who was born in his human aspect. This twist of fate saved Carnagan's life, as his parents had attracted the attention of some experienced hunters.

A party of adventurers, lead by the famous Dr. Rudolph van Richten, found the werebeasts cave and slaughtered the parents and the newborns. Just as they were about to leave, a tiny wail pieced the silence. An anchorite of Ezra named Lian found a young infant behind a rock. Assuming that the creatures had intended to use the child as a snack for their newborns, Lian decided to adopted him. The child had no wounds, so checking him for lycanthropy was thought unnecessary.

At the Temple of Ezra in Port-a-Lucine, the other anchorites agreed to take in the child. At the naming ceremony, Lian named the infant Carnagan Wolfe. He thought the last name would serve as a reminder to the debt that the child owed Ezra.

In the loving environment of the temple, Carnagan received a good education. The anchorites spoiled him, as the young rapsallion was a nice break from the usually solemn life of a keeper of the faith.

Carnagan was an energetic child. His imagination ran wild, as he pretended to hunt dragons and save damsels while running between the legs of many of the faithful.

Carnagan was unable to grasp the concept of the anchorite's studied neutrality. It made no sense to him that they should balance their emotions and motivations until some unseen power revealed her mystical secrets.

The local gendarmes brought the young child back to the temple more than once. Carnagan seemed to enjoy the idea of taking from the rich and giving to the poor. These occasions became fewer and fewer as he grew, not because he was mending his ways, but because he was getting better at avoiding getting caught.

Eventually, the anchorites decided that the priesthood was not meant for Carnagan. So, pulling in a few favors, they got the boy a apprenticeship at a carpenter and a weaponsmith.

Unfortunately, Carnagan would only receive a year of education at each, as he soon gave away some of the craftsman's goods out of the kindness of his heart, and was fired. Helping people seemed to be more in Carnagan's nature than being a merchant.

A month after Carnagan's fourteenth birthday, he found one of his friends lying dead in an alley. She had been completely drained of blood. A week after the funeral, he saw her again.

Following her to a graveyard, Carnagan tried to ask her what had happened. Instead of answering, she leapt at him, fangs bared, thirsting for his blood. As he stood, frozen with horror, the corrupt night creature tried to bite him.

Revulsion, fear, pity and hatred welled up inside him. He saw the creature in front of him as a horrible parody of his friend. The kindness that had marked her personality was gone and her darker side had been enhanced. As these negative feelings overwhelmed Carnagan, he blacked out.

Upon coming to, Carnagan was horrified to find the vampire had been torn to pieces and spread out over the graveyard. Even more horrific, the pieces that were left appeared to have been *chewed*.

Gathering up his tattered clothing, the terrified boy ran to Lian. Grimly, his adoptive father performed the rite to detect a lycanthrope. The indication showed that not only was Carnagan a werebeast, he was a true lycanthrope. He could never be free of the Dread Disease.

Lian was unable to kill his ward. Carnagan fled into the night, unable to stay in the temple any longer. Alone

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in the world, he traveled the Core, looking for a place to call home. Eventually, he found Verbrek.

Verbrek was a place where his lycanthropic kind ruled the wilds. Carnagan decided that he might be able to find a life for himself there.

Carnagan was welcomed by the werewolf clans of Verbrek with open arms. He was required to speak with their high priest, one Alfred Timothy, but after merely telling his story, Timothy allowed Carnagan a place in the community.

Carnagan felt like a lost child who had come home. The other lycanthropes spent time with him, teaching him how to control his changes. Eventually, he even mastered the art of transformation so completely that he was able to effect only partial changes.

To support himself, Carnagan plied his knowledge of carpentry and taught the children of the village to read. Being intelligent, strong and self-sufficient, he soon became the one of the most desirable bachelors in the village. Even so, Carnagan had enough trouble with human women, and wasn't really interested in pursuing a relation with the aggressive she-wolves that were showing interest.

Unfortunately, during the first meeting that he went to at the Circle, Carnagan's world was once again destroyed.

At the meeting, it was decided that since Carnagan could shape wood, they didn't need the human carpenter, Yurgi Branktoff. Yurgi was brought before the council, stripped of all his clothing and told that he had half an hour to make it to the border.

Yurgi wasn't even halfway there when the werewolves caught him.

Carnagan was horrified. The people with whom he lived murdered innocent humans as if they were cattle. At this time, Carnagan took to hunting his own food. If he didn't catch it himself, he refused to eat it.

Years passed, and as Carnagan was approaching the age of 23, he was caught in aiding a human to escape the "Game." He had been doing this for some time, as he perfected his control and tried to better the humans way of life in Verbrek.

Carnagan was dragged before Alfred Timothy. The High Priest of the Wolf God was outraged that Carnagan would consider aiding prey in escaping the hunters.

He said, "Until you accept what you are, you shall never feel as though you belong!"

A long sword was brought out and Timothy enchanted it. He bound it to Carnagan's soul, so that no other could use it. Then, he laid down a curse. As long as the moon ran through its phases, Carnagan would have to kill one creature each month. If he did not, the sword would cut away at his self control, until he became nothing more than the beast he attempted to control. Yet, even as he fought to maintain his humanity, the sword's

bloodlust would never let him feel like he belonged anywhere. Once Carnagan embraced his heritage, he would be allowed to return to Verbrek.

Almost as an afterthought, Timothy added the clause that the sword could not be used to hurt werewolves. Any other lycanthrope was fine, but not werewolves.

With that, Carnagan was exiled from Verbrek. Once again, he was alone.

Current Sketch

Fortunately, Carnagan has found a loophole in Timothy's cruel curse: the sword is equally sated by the living or the undead. By slaying at least one soulless, undead creature a month, Carnagan has been able to avoid taking innocent lives.

Carnagan has spent the past few years as a complete outcast. As a result, he is shy and quiet. Unless he has something important to say, he will just stand by and listen. While he truly wishes to belong, the curse placed on him always prevents him from being himself. In situations where he must be social with a large number of people he does not know, he becomes nauseous and has a constant doubt about his being there. Also, he has found that he is allergic to alcohol. If he drinks it, he becomes violently ill.

Around women he finds attractive, Carnagan becomes tongue-tied and nervous. He speaks in short, one-word sentences and tries to find excuses to get away. If the person works with him for a bit, or he is forced to have a lengthy conversation, Carnagan is capable of working past this shyness. Currently, he has moved to Mordentshire and is trying to work up the nerve to woo a certain woman he has seen around town. Unfortunately, he doesn't even know her name, and unless she makes the first move or meets him on an adventure, it seems unlikely that Carnagan will even do anything more than smile and nod at her as she walks by.

At no time will Carnagan admit to being a loup-garou. If talking to another infected lycanthrope and he needs to show that he has control, he will transform. Also, if confronted with undeniable proof of his true nature, he will admit the truth and then react according to how the characters handle the situation. He will not kill them to silence them, and will answer all questions truthfully.

Carnagan moved to Mordentshire for two reasons. The first is the fact that it suffers no lack of the undead in the area around Gryphon Hill. The second is his hope to convince the young Weathermay-Foxgrove sisters to allow him to make use of Van Richten's massive library. So far, Gennifer has been always busy and Carnagan has only dealt with Laurie. This doesn't seem to be a problem, and while he can make small talk with her, he

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can't seem to become calm enough to ask if he can use the library.

Should Carnagan be given a chance to help someone who has lycanthropy, he will quickly finish his current hunt and aid them in finding the bloodline's progenitor. Should the cure not work, he will even offer to induct them into his "pack" and teach them to control their lycanthropy.

Finally, Carnagan realizes that the reason he feels like an outcast is because of the curse. If he stops killing undead he will finally feel like he fits in. Unfortunately, he also realizes that if he does this, he will lose control of the beast within. So far, he feels that being an outcast is better than being a murderer.

Combat

During combat, Carnagan usually uses his long sword, Harbinger. Harbinger is a *long sword +1, +3 vs. undead*. As Harbinger is bound to Carnagan through an unbreakable bond, no one else can wield it in battle. Also, if Carnagan concentrates and says the phrase "Harbinger, come" the sword will appear in a free hand. If the blade is in danger of hitting Carnagan, it becomes incorporeal.

In any month that Carnagan does not slay a creature, including the undead, his Wisdom score will drop by 1 point and his Charisma will rise by 1. After one month, he is able to succumb to bloodlust, though with a +4 to his saving throw. Every month after, the saving throw bonus diminishes, until finally he loses complete control of himself in the fifth month. If he goes six months without purposefully killing any creatures on purpose (an accident does not count), then he will become chaotic evil and return to Verbrek to claim his place in their community. Whenever he does kill an (undead) creature before the sixth month, he gains 1 point of Wisdom and loses one point of Charisma. When his Wisdom is once again 18, he regains control of himself and is once again immune to the bloodlust.

When fighting werewolves, Carnagan uses two snaplock pistols in his belt. If he knows what creature he is going up against, he loads them with the proper ammunition (silver bullets, golden bullets, iron bullets, etc.). If not, he will load them with regular bullets. Each shot inflicts 1d8 points of damage; if the roll comes up 8, reroll and add the results. The pistols carry only one bullet each and take a turn to reload. At no time may Carnagan use Harbinger to cause damage to another werewolf. The blade will pass completely through the target.

Carnagan can only be hurt by golden weapons or those with a +1 or better enchantment. All wounds caused by normal weapons heal as fast as they are made if he is in his hybrid or wolf form. In human form, though,

the wounds are cosmetic and fade in one hour. He has even discovered that he is immune to falls, poisons, and drowning.

In wolf or hybrid aspect, Carnagan will only use his teeth or claws against opponents that cannot catch lycanthropy (the undead, magical constructs, shambling mounds, etc.). Otherwise, he will only transform to run for cover or to heal damage.

Whenever Wolfe transforms, he heals 1d6x10% of any damage that he has suffered since his last transformation.

Against undead, Wolfe gains a +2 onus on all proficiency and ability checks. Also, he gains a +2 on all damage rolls against these unnatural creatures. Conversely, undead gain a +2 bonus on initiative against Wolfe.

Carnagan is allergic to alcohol. If ingested, it will make him violently ill for 1d6 days. Concentrated alcohol, such as in meeklebrau, burns his skin for 1d4 damage.

As a result of his heritage Carnagan is immune to all other forms of lycanthropy. If Carnagan makes a fear or horror check prompted by witnessing a lycanthrope transform or attack, then the only result of his failure is that he is surprised for one round. He has transformed enough times for it not to shock him if someone else does it.

Around other people, Carnagan has a 5% cumulative chance to sense if someone is a werewolf. If he senses that someone is, he will quietly confront that person. If they wish to be cured, he will aid them in their quest.

If the cure fails, Carnagan may offer to teach the person to control the beast. If they accept, he stays with them until they are triggered into transforming. Then he transforms into his hybrid aspect and fights them. When he has established dominance, they must spend a period of time with him. For every year they spend with him, they gain 1 point to their Wisdom score. When they have reached a score of 18, they are immune to the bloodlust. The only requirement Carnagan insists upon before he takes on a protégé is that the person must be of a good alignment and must spend some time adventuring with him. For Carnagan to trust them enough to teach them, then they must go with him on his hunts.

Adventure Hooks

- ❖ A dying anchorite named Lian asks the heroes to find his adopted son. The priest offers only Carnagan's name, a sealed letter to give him, and a few rumors of where the man might be. The heroes will be working under a time limit, hoping to find Carnagan before Lian passes away. If they find Carnagan, the heroes have to convince him to see his adoptive father.

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Carnagan will be wary of going, as he falsely feels that he is nothing but a monster in Lian's eyes.

If the heroes get Carnagan to Lian's deathbed in time, the old man begs his son's forgiveness. Carnagan says that he never blamed him for anything. Lian then dies. After Lian breathes his last, Carnagan lets out a howl of sorrow that is echoed by all wolves within one mile. The heroes must then decide how to approach this sudden turn of events.

If Lian has already died, Carnagan asks the heroes to escort him to the grave. There, he lets out the grieving howl, which is echoed by all wolves within one mile. The heroes then find themselves in a difficult situation, as Carnagan is obviously not human.

- ❖ One of the party members is grabbed by a mob of angry villagers. They accuse him or her of being a werewolf and decide to burn the hero at the stake as soon as possible. If the other party members try to free their friend, Carnagan will show up and help them in the middle of the rescue attempt. If they are content to sit back and watch their comrade burn, then Carnagan will show up at the last possible second and save the intended victim. He will explain to the heroes that the village has recently been terrorized by a vampire disguising its killing as those of a wild beast. He asks if they will help him hunt down and destroy the creature.

If Carnagan agrees with the way that the heroes handle themselves during this adventure, he may stay with them for a time after.

At no time will Carnagan actually hurt a villager. He understands that they are merely frightened and are not thinking clearly.

- ❖ If one of the player characters has been infected with lycanthropy, Carnagan approaches him or her and offers to help them gain a cure. He does know the cure, but the main problem is finding the bloodline's progenitor. If the cure attempt fails, Wolfe may offer to teach them to control the beast through the method described above.



THE EFFIGY OF IVAN SZIMIN

A Burning Desire for Vengeance

by Stuart Turner
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BIOGRAPHY

In occupied Gundarak, the natives live a hard life. Many would say that Count Strahd has only replaced the monstrous Duke Gundar with new monsters of his own making, in the shape of the boyars and burgomeisters that rule with apparent impunity. The Gundarakite peoples' growing faith in the Morning-lord is one of the few comforts they have come to enjoy.

The death of Ivan Szimin, then, is a double blow to the Gundarakites. Not only has one of their monsters become truly monstrous, but also he holds in his hands the destruction of the faith that maintains their hope.

Appearance

The effigy of Ivan Szimin is a ramshackle construction of wood, with no apparent craftsmanship or care in its design or construction. Standing almost eight feet tall, the figure is only vaguely recognizable as a human form.

The pieces of the golem are taken from a wide variety of sources, most of them found on any average farm. The torso is an upended wooden water trough, its corners filled with rotting farm refuse. Holes have been smashed in the rotting wood of the trough to attach the arms and legs, made of old fence-posts, spokes from cart-wheels, and planks from old furniture. The pieces of the limbs are nailed together, forming more joints than any normal arm or leg should have. The effigy's feet are an upended bucket and a chopping block. The right hand is a rusty metal head of a pitchfork, while the left is a forked tree branch.

The head is a small crate resting upside-down atop a short wooden post. The crate is not nailed or attached to the post in any way, allowing it to twist and pivot as

The Effigy of Ivan Szimin

Wood Golem, Neutral Evil

Armor Class	6	Str	19
Movement	9	Dex	18
Level/Hit Dice	8	Con	20
Hit Points	48	Int	13
THAC0	12	Wis	2
Morale	20	Cha	3
No. of Attacks	2	XP	6,000
Damage/Attack	2d6/2d6		
Special Attacks	Fire damage (see below), produce flame		
Special Defenses	+1 or better magical weapons to hit; immune to poison, disease; immune to mind- and life-affecting magic; immune to fire		
Special Vulnerabilities	Water		
Magic Resistance	Nil		

the golem moves. A single black knothole on one side of the crate serves as the golem's only eye.

A medallion rests on the torso of the golem, hanging from a thick gold chain that runs around its neck. The medallion is imprinted with the seal of Von Zarovich, and is the chain of office for all boyars and burgomeisters in Barovia.

Few people get to see the creation in its inert form. When incensed, the effigy of Ivan Szimin becomes engulfed in flames, which reach up to five feet above the figure's head at their most intense. The only parts of the golem which never burn are the metal pitchfork which serves as its right hand, and the black knothole that the creation sees through. Even in the most intense infernos, the single black eye can always be seen peering through the flames at its victim.

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Background

Ivan Szimin was just one of many corrupt boyars in the former Gundarak. Known for his fierce temper, Ivan is a graying, middle-aged man. His left eye remains permanently closed, lost to disease in his younger years. Like most Barovians he despises Gundarakites.

With little or no guidance from above, and almost complete autonomy, Ivan quickly learned many interesting ways in which to exploit the Gundarakites for his own benefit. While most corrupt officials are clandestine about their wealth, Ivan was a showoff, proudly displaying to visitors the latest trinkets he had imported from the wealthy western lands of Dementlieu and Richemulot.

It was only a matter of time before some of his victims, guided by a young rebel eager to create unrest against the Barovian rulers, took action against him.

Ardonk Szerieza is barely old enough to remember life before the Barovian invasion of Gundarak, but he is utterly convinced that his people were better off under Duke Gundar than they are under Von Zarovich's boyars. Over recent years, the young man has been inciting action among the Gundarakites, from petty resistance to destruction of Barovian property. He is slowly and carefully building a loyal band of followers, but often the impetuous rebel acts alone, and with devastating effect.

It was inevitable that Ivan Szimin would eventually come to Ardonk's attention. When Ivan increased the land tax by 50%, but excluded the few Barovian farmers on his lands, Ardonk decided to take action. That night, he found three Gundarakite farmers drowning their sorrows in illegally brewed potato-ale.

Ardonk listened to the men for an hour, becoming increasingly incensed at how easily the downtrodden farmers had resigned themselves to another winter of near starvation at the hands of their boyar. He found it almost impossible to grasp the Gundarakite tendency to accept oppression and hardship without resistance, and was determined that he would show these men that they could take action.

By the time Ardonk introduced himself the farmers were well and truly intoxicated by the potato-ale, and Ardonk's persuasive arguments soon drove them to action. The plan was simple; they would construct a wooden effigy of Ivan, and burn it outside his manor. Believing that Ivan was in Teufeldorf for a dinner with some Barovian associates, Ardonk also planned to steal something of the boyar's to place on the effigy, to ensure that Ivan understood the message.

While the farmers began piecing together the effigy from pieces of wood around their farms, Ardonk left to break into the boyar's home. Unfortunately for Ardonk, Ivan had not made it to Teufeldorf that fateful night, due to a stomach illness. Instead, Ivan was answering some

correspondence from friends in Vallaki, while sipping on his tuika. When he heard a noise downstairs, he picked up an ornate silver letter-opener from his desk and went to investigate.

When Ivan saw the young Gundarakite lifting the gold medallion from its stand, he was enraged. That a filthy Gundarakite child would dare steal from him was unbelievable! Waving his silver letter-opener threateningly, Ivan roared at Ardonk, demanding that he leave immediately.

Ardonk, unfortunately, didn't understand Balok, the language of the Barovians. But he did hear the word "Gundarakite" spoken with venom, and saw Ivan wielding a weapon. He began to reach for his dagger, fumbling at the back of his belt. At the same time, he spat back accusations in his own language, Luktar.

As the shouting match grew fiercer, Ardonk continued to search for his dagger. Neither man understanding the words of the other, they each swore that the other's people would soon pay for their mistakes. Forced back into a corner, and with the letter opener pointed directly at his eyes, Ardonk plunged his dagger into the stomach of Ivan Szimin, picked up the medallion, and fled the boyar's manor.

The three farmers had brought the effigy by cart to the road near Ivan's grounds. They could see Ivan's home, and waited nervously for Ardonk to return. When he did, they acted quickly. Ardonk flung the medallion over the head of the monstrosity, while the still-intoxicated farmers set alight the oil-soaked wood.

For a moment the farmers stood and watched the inferno. Despite being drunk, the experience was a cathartic one. Hatred for the Barovian boyars had been building in the men for more than 15 years, with no outlet. For just a moment, as they watched the flames leap around the ramshackle structure, they were able to truly believe that they were watching Ivan Szimin burn for his sins.

Ardonk, with his head grounded firmly in reality, soon ushered them away from the burning cart.

Meanwhile, Ivan Szimin struggled to his window, desperate for one last look at his assailant. Holding one hand to his wound to stem the flow of blood, he used the other to pull his head up to the window. There, he saw the night lit up by a bonfire. No, not a bonfire—a burning statue, which appeared to be looking directly at him through a black knothole in the wooden head. As he caught a glimpse of gold on the torso of the construction, realization dawned upon him.

Filled with a rage and hatred of Gundarakites like he had never known before, Ivan's last moments were spent staring into the eye of the effigy.

Stepan, one of the farmers, turned back not 50 yards from the blaze, hearing the neighing of his horse which he had left tethered to the cart. Cursing his slow head and

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the potato-ale, he returned to untie the animal. As he did so, his eyes were drawn the towering inferno that they had created. As he looked up, a loud pop came from the wood, and the whole structure moved slightly, settling as it burned. The movement started the crate representing the head rocking on its “neck.” Stepan stared as the fiery crate slowly spun on the post, the black knothole slowly coming into view.

The crate stopped, the single, unblinking eye of the effigy staring directly at Stepan through the flames.

A horrible realization settled on Stepan, making him drop the reins of his horse, and fall to the ground, kneeling in front of the figure. Though the heat was blistering his cheeks, prayers rushed through his head. As he watched the flaming effigy begin to move, and slowly step down from the back of the cart, he could think of only one thing to say.

“Forgive me, Morninglord!”

Current Sketch

Since the day that boyar Ivan Szimin was murdered in his home near Teufeldorf, and the farmer Stepan Klizera was found outside the boyar’s residence, nearly burnt to a crisp, rumors of strange events have been circulating among the people of the occupied Gundarak. Two of the farmhouses near Ivan’s residence mysteriously burned to the ground in the weeks after the boyar’s death. Unexplained fires have started in the oddest of places, and in more than one case the residents were burned alive.

This is the work of the effigy of Ivan Szimin. After disposing of the remaining two farmers that helped Ardonk Szimin, the golem has begun wandering the lands of Barovia in search of other rebellious Gundarakites. In particular, it is searching for Ardonk Szerieza, or anyone working with or for him.

The conspicuous nature of the effigy means that most of its movements must be at night. Generally, it will seek a hiding place during the night and then spend several days or more observing the locals, looking for those it considers guilty of treason against Lord Strahd, or the local boyars and burgomeisters.

As the effigy’s spying must be done from a distance, its methods of detecting those guilty of rebellion are very broad. Often, the judgment is made simply on the comings and goings of local Gundarakites, and whether other known rebels are in regular contact with the individual. The golem has even refrained from killing some known members of Ardonk’s rebels, using them to lead it to other offenders.

Of course, these methods are not perfect, and more than one innocent Gundarakite (and even some Barovians) have been mistakenly murdered by the golem. The effigy is unaware of this, however, simply believing

that it is successfully eradicating the guilty members of the populace.

In addition to the cruel deaths of Gundarakite rebels, the effigy of Ivan Szimin is inflicting a more spiritual, and in some ways more destructive, punishment on the oppressed people of Barovia. Few have seen the flaming effigy, and those that have lived to tell the tale have usually only seen it from a great distance, the fiery figure walking away from a scene of destruction. Those few tell vivid stories of the glowing skin and the flames that leapt from the head of the being.

The many Gundarakites who have joined the Children of the Morninglord are struggling to know what to make of this situation. Some are excited that the Morninglord has finally arrived to free them from tyranny, but most, associating the death of friends with the Morninglord’s appearance, fear that they are being punished. In many areas where faith in the Morninglord had been strong, confusion now reigns as the people struggle to reconcile their belief that the Morninglord will save them, with the apparent wrath being visited upon their people.

In a land where faith is one of the few comforts many people have, this confusion is making the people very disillusioned indeed. For the Gundarakite people, it seems that oppression is a state that they must continue to bear.

Personality

The effigy of Ivan Szimin was born of hatred, and as a result is rarely capable of any other emotion. It is not, however, an indiscriminate source of violence and death in Barovia. The creature’s hate is directed only at the growing band of rebellious Gundarakites that dare to act against the Barovians.

The golem is surprisingly patient when determining exactly who its next victim should be. It will sometimes watch from a forest for days attempting to identify whether a Gundarakite is deserving of its justice. Once that decision is made, however, nothing will prevent the golem from tracking down its victim.

Combat

The effigy’s true ferocity is revealed in combat. On the first round of combat with the golem, its wooden frame begins to smolder. In the second round, flames will begin to lick at the wooden torso, and start spreading over the rest of the figure. During this time, anyone hit by Ivan suffers an extra 1d2 points of fire damage. By the third round, the entire figure will be consumed by fire, making it difficult to even come close to the golem. Those hit by the golem once it has reached this stage take an extra 1d4 points of fire damage on top of the normal 2d6 damage

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per attack. In addition, anyone in melee combat with the creature suffers 1d4 points of damage per round from the intense heat of the flames.

Of course, a side effect of the golem's inferno is that almost any nearby flammable material will catch on fire when the golem burns. If the battle is inside a wooden building, it is almost certain that the structure will soon be burning rapidly. Similarly, if the victims of the golem's attacks are wearing anything flammable, it is quite possible they will continue to sustain fire damage in later rounds (as determined by the Dungeon Master).

The effigy's fire can be maintained for 10 rounds (including the round in which it smolders), after which the automaton cannot restart the flames for one hour. Over this time, the golem gradually changes from being a black and charred back into its original wooden form.

The effigy can also produce flame similar to the priest spell of the same name. Rather than create the flame in its hand, however, the golem is able to start the flame anywhere within a range of 30 feet. The flame can only be created where combustible material exists. A favorite tactic of the golem is to start a fire within the residence of its latest target, creating a distraction while the creature enters the building. The effigy can use this ability up to three times per day.

The effigy moves slowly for such a large structure, due to the haphazard way in which its limbs were constructed. As a result, it is generally poor at chasing victims down. Instead, the golem will usually try to trap its victims inside a burning structure, using its produce flame ability. Frequently, it will lure victims to a building by starting a fire, hoping that its target will come to put out the blaze.

Due to the poor construction of the golem, it can be damaged by weapons of +1 or greater enchantment, rather than the +2 weapons required to damage most RAVENLOFT golems. It is immune to all forms of fire, magical or otherwise. Like all other golems, it is unaffected by toxins or disease, and is immune to all mind-affecting or life-affecting magic.

When the effigy is burning, its greatest weakness is water. Dousing the figure with a bucket of water will inflict 1d8 points of damage. To do this, the attacker must be within 15 feet of the golem, and must make a hit roll against Ivan's normal AC. If the attacker enters melee range, the hit roll is made against AC 10, but the accompanying damage from the fire is taken.

If, somehow, the golem is completely submerged during one of its infernos, it immediately suffers 6d8 damage and is rendered immobile for 2d6 rounds. During this time, the golem's normal invulnerability to non-magical weapons is removed. Achieving this can be difficult, however, as the golem actively avoids using its inferno ability when near obvious water sources (such as rivers or lakes).

Zeitgeber: The effigy of Ivan Szimin is rendered immobile by the sight of either a burning effigy, or a large bonfire. On seeing such a fire, the golem will stop and stare for 2d6 rounds, just as Ivan Szimin did in his last moments looking from his manor window. During this time, it will not react to any provocation. To work, the bonfire must be purpose-built, and must be in an open space. That is, a burning tree or a burning cart will not suffice. The bonfire must be at least six feet tall, and must be burning strongly to have any effect.

Adventure Ideas

- ❖ The heroes are duped into being part of one of Ardonk's acts of rebellion. (Or possibly they are a willing participant!) In the weeks following the event, the heroes are followed by a strange series of fiery accidents, in which some recent acquaintances are killed. The effigy is using the heroes as a sources of new suspected rebels, and is taking revenge on them. Very soon, the effigy will stop using the heroes and will take out its revenge on them personally.
- ❖ A boyar on the outskirts of Zeidenburg is killed in a house fire. Rumors in the town suggest that a fiery figure, probably the Morninglord, was seen in the structure as it burned. The heroes are employed by Zeidenburg's burgomeister to investigate these rumors. While delving into the boyar's affairs, they begin to discover he was working with Ardonk Szerieza in a plot to assassinate the burgomeister. Do they reveal the information to the oppressive mayor and search for the rebels (discovering that the effigy is beating them to the crunch in most cases)? Or do they decide to assist the rebels, and have to face the effigy of Ivan Szimin as it attempts to stop their assassination attempt?
- ❖ A priest of the Children of the Morninglord in a small village asks the heroes to investigate reports of the Morninglord's appearance. In uncovering the connection between the victims, the heroes learn of the effigy's medallion of office. An angry confrontation begins as the cult members start blaming Strahd's officials for the deaths, threatening to plunge the small town into a bloody battle between the Barovians and the Gundarakites. The heroes must uncover the true cause of the deaths to placate the townspeople before blood is spilled.



INESKO KROLOV

Mind Over Body

by "Tykus the Gladiator"
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BIOGRAPHY

For some people, one life is not enough. Inesko Krolov is one such man; for a century and a half, he has been stealing one body after another, trading his old lives for new.

Appearance

Well over a century has passed since anyone has seen the "real" Inesko Krolov. The body of Inesko Krolov died over 150 years ago, but it his soul had already fled that moral shell. An accomplished telepath, Inesko has spent the decades since switching his personality from whatever body that he currently possesses with stronger, healthier specimens. When that body withers too far beyond recovery, Inesko trades places with someone new, leaving the psyche of the new body in the old one. The body continues to deteriorate (as described under the Switch Personalities science description in *The Complete Psionics Handbook*) and eventually dies. Meanwhile Inesko lives out a new life in his new body, until time comes to find another, continuing the cycle.

Ghostwatchers, psychics, or the use of *true seeing* spells or other means of detecting spirits or psyches, can see an image of Inesko overlaid with the body he currently inhabits. Inesko's true appearance is that of a frail, old man with white, thinning hair, and dressed in bedclothes. Occasionally, ghostwatchers will also see the ghost of the body's original owner tailing Inesko and the usurped body. (These are usually weak first magnitude ghosts.)

Inesko Krolov

14th-Level Disembodied Psionicist, Neutral Evil

Armor Class	*	Str	*
Movement	*	Dex	*
Level/Hit Dice	14/ *	Con*	
Hit Points	*	Int	18
THACO	*	Wis	17
No. of Attacks	*	Cha*	
Damage/Attack	By weapon		
Special Attacks	Psionics		
Special Defenses	Psionics		
Magic Resistance	Nil		

* Determined by host body.

Psionic Summary: *Player's Option* alternatives are presented in italics. Several of these psionic sciences and devotions are fully described in the DARK SUN accessory *The Will and the Way*.

Level	Dis/Sci/Dev	Attack/Defense	Score	PSPs
14	5/7/19	All, All	18	**

** Varies between 114 and 195, as determined by host body. See below.

MTHACO: 5 **#Mental Att:** 2/1 **MAC:** 4

Clairsentience - Science: Detection

Devotions: See Magic, Sensitivity to Observation, Spirit Sense

Psychokinesis - Devotion: Molecular Manipulation

Psychometabolism - Sciences: Complete Healing, Life Draining

Devotions: Body Weaponry, Cause Sleep, Cell Adjustment, Flesh Armor

Psychoporation - Devotion: *Pocket Dimension*

Telepathy - Sciences: Mindlink, Probe, Switch Personality, *Psychic Surgery*

Devotions: Acceptance, Conceal Thoughts, ESP, False Sensory Output, Impossible Task, Invincible

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Foes, Mysterious Traveler, Sightlink, Soundlink, *Psychic Blade*

Metapsionics - Sciences: Psychic Surgery

Devotions: Cannibalize (remove if using *Player's Option*), *Psychic Blade*

Arcane Option: If you wish to replace the psionics with magical equivalents, here are a few suggestions: *locate object, detect magic, detect scrying, detect undead* (incorporeal types only); *shatter; heal* (self only), *vampiric touch, flame blade, sleep, cure light wounds, spirit armor; seepockets; telepathy* (not a defined spell, similar to those used by fiends and celestials), *ESP, iron mind, psychic protection, tower of mental resistance, suggestion, mass suggestion, change self, phantasmal force, mind blank, magic jar* (like the ghost ability).

Background

Inesko was born the son of a noble family in Darkon. While growing up, he discovered that he had a gift for psionics. Trained by the finest mentalists available, Inesko became well-known in aristocratic circles as a skilled negotiator and diplomat for the Krolov family. After years of helping his family assert their influence in the region, Inesko became bored and took up the life of an adventurer as a relief from societal power plays. Hooking up with an adventuring group, Inesko used his talents to manipulate foes and extract information from captured opponents. Inesko adventured for over twenty years, occasionally returning home with the accumulated wealth from his exploits to supplement the family fortune. Eventually he retired, the years starting to creep up on him, pushed along by an encounter with a ghost that had aged Krolov enough to think about his own mortality.

Krolov started a family and returned to the aristocracy that had begun his life. Tales of his adventures were stock at every party. Children and adults alike enjoyed the stories, but Inesko missed the adventures and time was catching up to him.

By the end of his mortal life, Inesko was a grandfather with many descendants. He was no longer needed in social circles, nor could he return to a life of adventure. His experience was for naught in the face of the ravages of old age. He actually inspired his descendants to take up adventuring as a means to proving themselves. But for all Inesko's adventures, he still found himself fearing death.

Ever since the ghostly attack, Inesko had become obsessed with his own mortality and bitter with the loss of years. As a former adventurer, he knew of age-reversing magics and various forms of undeath. Undeath held no appeal for him, and he knew that he lacked the necessary skills to become a psionic lich. Age-reversing magic could only last so long, and held the risk of magical

backfire. Thus Inesko Krolov sought a psionic answer. As a telepath, psychometabolism was not his strongest discipline, even though he did possess some talent in it. Eventually, time and death came to claim him.

Laying on his deathbed, Inesko struggled to stay alive. During his final breaths, with his family around, Inesko heard a dark whisper in the back of his mind: "Youth is wasted on the young. Look at them. Each one of them is looking forward for you to die so they can claim a part of what you have spent so long to build. They don't want to prove themselves, just to live in your faded glory. You could switch your mind with that of one of these would-be aristocrats. Let that person die in this frail body while you can live out the youth that you lost in a new one."

A dark glimmer of hope sparked within him. Inesko bid all but one of his relatives, his grandson Alexander, to leave. While Inesko had many grandsons, Alex reminded Inesko of himself when he was of Alex's age, both in looks and temperament. Inesko believed that by taking over Alex's body, he could have a second chance at life. Inesko caused Alexander to sleep after everyone left, then proceeded to switch personalities. Inesko Krolov's body died along with Alex's soul that night. Krolov was ecstatic with prospect of being young again, and lived a new life in the guise of his own grandson. But Inesko's own treachery and newfound immortality had a price. A foreign personality in the host body causes the body to eventually wither and die (as described in *The Complete Psionics Handbook*). When Alexander's body grew weak, Inesko switched personalities with a traveler and left Alexander's body to die with the traveler's soul trapped within it. Thus began the cycle.

Current Sketch

Inesko has been switching bodies for over 150 years. In that time, he has learned a few tricks for his new mode of existence. First, he only takes over the bodies of truly rugged individuals, such as warriors. Many of them have high Constitution scores, allowing Inesko to last longer in the new body. Second, he tries to avoid taking over the bodies of children, since their bodies usually cannot withstand an extended stay. Third, Inesko tries to avoid taking over the bodies of individuals who have unique skills, such as spellcasting or thieving abilities. Other than these restrictions, Inesko adventures where he pleases; selling his talents to adventuring companies who think him nothing more than an extremely good fighter.

When a host body is close death, Inesko seeks a likely candidate (be they male or female) and attempts to get to know the person. If the candidate is a traveler through the area, so much the better. At some point, Inesko will try to get the candidate alone with him and proceed to make the switch. Inesko will then administer a

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quick-acting poison to make sure that the “old body, new soul” doesn’t live long enough to reveal what has happened. He then arranges to have the old body either returned to the original family for burial or buried in a local graveyard.

Combat

While he tries to avoid physical combat, Inesko has all the abilities of 14th-level psionist. Due to the varying Constitution of the bodies he inhabits, his maximum number of PSPs varies between 114 and 195 (Con 15 through Con 20). Inesko attacks using his own THAC0, but has the hit points of the previous owner. He uses his own saving throw scores regardless of the body he is in.

It should be noted that Inesko Krolov is not undead. He has none of their spell immunities, nor can he be turned or affected by spells that target the undead. He is simply a wandering psyche. However, Inesko is unaware that he is vulnerable to the *resurrection* spell. If such a spell is cast on his current body, the original soul will return to his host body, and Inesko must make an immediate save vs. death magic. A successful saving throw means that he cohabitates with the resurrected soul and fights a mental war with the returned spirit. Failure means that Inesko’s spirit is ejected from his host body. Not only does the host body regain its original soul, Inesko will be *resurrected* in his original. Unfortunately for Inesko, his original body is buried six feet underground, and Inesko has no psychoportive psionics that could help extricate himself.

Adventuring Ideas

- ❖ Inesko has taken over the body of one of the player characters, and the original soul of that character is now a ghost. This would be an excellent role-playing situation (not to mention a chance to use the *Requiem* rules). Have the player play Inesko, while you control the ghost. Who’s the real villain?
- ❖ A trail of unexplained deaths has occurred over the course of a few years in a town. The heroes discover that the mysterious deaths have been going on for decades; people have been slowly wasting away, always one victim at a time.
- ❖ Once every year, Inesko returns to the site of his own and Alexander’s graves. Local townsfolk have noticed this cycle of yearly visits to the two graves by a different person each time. Why is it a different visitor every year? The Krolov family wants to know: Did Inesko sire other descendants during his adventuring days?



BEAUTY'S GARDEN

Ashes, Ashes, We All Fall Down

by Jaleigh Johnson
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BIOGRAPHY

Caulden leaned forward, across the length of the crumbling stone bench, listening intently to the soft voice of his young companion, his plate mail creaking slightly in the silence of the evening. “What is your name, child?” he said kindly, his eyes and voice betraying only a hint of trepidation—or so he hoped. You would do well to remember what it is you converse with, he chided himself silently.

The child regarded him with a mixture of curiosity and caution. She squirmed where she sat on the opposite end of the bench, swinging her frail legs carelessly back and forth as she contemplated his question. The dying sunlight caught in her unruly mass of hair, and Caulden glimpsed a hint of light, mousy brown that would have no doubt deepened to a healthy chestnut as she grew older—had she been given the chance. Just as quickly the light changed and he could see through her once more to the cold stone. He shivered involuntarily.

“Sarafine.” The voice was whisper-soft and hesitant, but he heard her.

Caulden swallowed and forced himself to smile gently. This was not as hard as he imagined it would be. Spirit or not, a child was a child, and he was not unaccustomed to being around them, nor was he a stranger to dealing with ghosts. He forced himself to admit the combination of the two unnerved him more than a little.

“Is this your garden, Sarafine?” he asked, raising a gloved hand to indicate the rosebushes that surrounded them. Dead and shriveled, the bushes were separated into neatly rotting clusters here and there by crumbling stone walkways and high walls.

The child-spirit brightened instantly and nodded. “’Tis almost as large as the estate itself,” she declared proudly, “and I myself care for most of the land.” She hopped off the bench and plucked a wilted blossom from its thorny nesting place, displaying it before Caulden as

if showing off a trophy. “They are beautiful, are they not?”

Caulden nodded slowly, his gray eyes sad. “Indeed, little one, they are perfect.”

The child grinned broadly and placed the rose in his hand with infinite care. This man was a bit different from the others, she realized. Not many tarried here in her part of the garden, and none had deigned to speak to her at length about her precious flowers.

She regarded him a bit more closely than usual. Same armor, sturdy clothing—that determined look to the eye—and a very big sword, just as she remembered with so many others who had come here before. It must be an awfully powerful sword, she thought soberly, the way he grasps the hilt so tightly. His eyes were constantly moving, waiting for some unseen enemy to leap out from behind the dense green shrubs and menace them. She stroked the petals of the bright red blossom in his palm lovingly; its scent teased her nose and made her giggle with pleasure. How could the man look so sad in a place such as this, she thought . . . then she remembered, and her face fell.

“Are you a knight?” the child asked suddenly.

Caulden smiled indulgently. “Of a sort, child. Have you met others such as me?”

Sarafine nodded grimly. “Many such. Are you here for the same reasons they were?” She paused and lowered her voice further, so that he strained to hear her. “Are you after . . . the Beast?”

This time the shudder that Caulden had been suppressing became painfully apparent, and he cursed himself for the momentary weakness. Something in her voice—was it disappointment?—chilled him for reasons he did not understand.

“Do you know of this creature, Sarafine?” he asked carefully. “Have you seen it?”

The child-spirit shook her head quickly; her eyes flashed a sudden, intense blue that made him stare, open-mouthed, before the color faded once again. “I am forbidden to speak of him. It would go badly, I fear.” She bit her lip reflexively, as if she could still feel the

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motion through phantom lips. She glanced about furtively, a look of worry on her face.

“It is all right, Sarafine,” Caulden soothed, quelling the urge to reach out and comfort her with a touch. “I will not ask further. I do not wish any harm to come to you.”

“N-no.” Sarafine ducked her head miserably and looked as if she might cry. “Not to me . . . to you.”



The legend of Beauty’s Garden, its enchantment, and its unfortunate fate is a well-known one to the people of Thornvale. In a small village where gossip and whispered tales spread like wildfires across the vast, empty fields of the countryside, this story is the most oft-repeated and surely the most tragic. Little known is that while the earth beneath this once lush landscape can no longer bear any semblance of life or beauty, the garden itself still stirs, guarded and cared for by two very different pairs of hands—one loving, one sinister.

Sarafine

3rd Magnitude Ghost, mutable, Lawful Neutral

Armor Class	-2 (4*)	Str	N/A
Movement	12	Dex	N/A
Hit Dice	7	Con	N/A
Hit Points	34	Int	12
THAC0	13	Wis	10
No. of Attacks	1	Cha	13
Morale	7	XP	7,500
Damage/Attack	See below		
Special Attacks	See below		
Special Defense	Hit only by weapons of +2 enchantment or higher		
Special Vulnerabilities	See below		
Magic Resistance	Nil		

* AC vs. ethereal opponents

Background

There was a time that the roses in Sarafine’s garden bloomed as beautifully as she claims. Centuries ago, as times of turmoil and financial hardship descended upon the surrounding lands, a wealthy merchant purchased a tract of land deep in the countryside as a safe haven for himself and his family. The land boasted only a small estate large enough for himself, his wife and their daughter Sarafine. The area also contained, to young Sarafine’s delight, an immense, walled garden with soil that was so fertile that local folk claimed it held magical properties. This seemed to be confirmed when, with very little tending by Sarafine, the garden produced the largest and most impressive display of roses and other exotic

flowers ever seen in the region. The merchant was exceedingly proud and boastful of his prize, and guarded it with such conviction that soon enough only Sarafine was allowed inside the garden walls to tend her precious plants.

When a stranger arrived at the estate and demanded entrance to the garden, the merchant flew into a rage and had the man thrown off his property. The stranger was, according to whispered rumors, a wizard who studied the dark aspects of magic and held the power to create potent spells. Vowing revenge on the merchant, the man—who was indeed a wizard—returned to the estate late one evening and set the garden ablaze. Horrified, Sarafine ran blindly from the house and into the garden in a vain attempt to save her flowers. The wizard watched in shock and awe as the flames spread, but failed to consume the roses. He concluded that the rumors about the land were true and that the garden was indeed enchanted. Further enraged, the wizard invoked a dark spell of his own creation that caused a black, choking mist to seep into the flowers and the earth beneath them. The magic corrupted the land’s enchantment and slowly killed everything that lived within the garden walls. As the flowers rotted and burned away, the wizard could have sworn he heard screams of anguish, as if the garden itself was crying out in agony and hatred.

In the morning, the garden had become a twisted mockery of its former glory. Sarafine was not seen again, and was presumed to have died in the fire along with her roses. To this day, the roses and plants exist in a perpetual state of rot, and the stench of decay fills the air. The soil is corrupted beyond any hope of recovery, able to support only the hardiest of weeds.

Appearance

Sarafine appears as an incorporeal child-spirit, standing 4’4”. She dresses in a flower-patterned sun-dress that is torn and infested with brambles. Her hair is long and tangled and her hands and bare feet are scarred with large, ugly slash marks that appear to have been made by thorns. Occasionally, Sarafine is able to assume a semi-tangible state. This seems to occur without any conscious thought on Sarafine’s part, and most often occurs when she is tending her roses. It should be noted that Sarafine looks much as she did just before her death, save that she bears no visible burns, though she is presumed to have died in the fire that spread through the garden. The reason for this is unknown.

Combat

As a ghost, Sarafine is now immune to all manner of biological spells, can be harmed only by magical weapons of +2 enchantment or higher, and can become invisible

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and pass through solid objects at will. As a third magnitude ghost she rejuvenates to full hit points at will in one round, leaving her unable to perform any action for 30 minutes. She also has the ability to *cause paralysis* and *charm person and mammal* as per the spells. While Sarafine has these powers and abilities readily at her disposal, she has never consciously used any of them. For all intents and purposes, Sarafine believes she is still a child and tending a flourishing rose garden as she did in life.

Current Sketch

Sarafine “lives,” plays, and tends her roses in her current state in much the same way she did while alive. In her mind’s eye, the garden flourishes under her care and the world outside the garden walls simply holds no interest for her. The memories of her own death and that of the garden seem to have been blocked completely from her mind. Not only does she not realize she is a ghost, but she is unaware of the dangerous powers she now possesses. However, Sarafine is painfully aware that she is not alone in her world, and has taken it upon herself to warn away travelers who seek entrance to the garden in order to confront this shadowy presence that she refers to as a beast. Sarafine is terrified of this dark presence, which manifests itself to her as a black, vaporous mist that smells of rot and decay. It watches over her constantly and has thus far succeeded in destroying all those who venture within the garden walls, despite Sarafine’s desperate attempts to warn visitors away. The origin of the Beast can be traced back to the night of the garden’s demise.

The Garden’s Shadow (The Beast)

3rd Magnitude Ghost, Semicorporeal, Chaotic Evil			
Armor Class	-2 (4*)	Str	N/A
Movement	12	Dex	N/A
Hit Dice	7	Con	N/A
Hit Points	40	Int	12
THAC0	13	Wis	14
No. of Attacks	1	Cha	7
Morale	14	XP	8,000
Damage/Attack	See below		
Special Attacks	See below		
Special Defense	Hit only by weapons of +2 enchantment or higher		
Special Vulnerabilities	Magical fire		
Magic Resistance	Nil		

* AC vs. ethereal opponents

Background

As the wizard’s dark spell and the fire’s flames consumed the magical garden and Sarafine with it, an inexplicable and terrible side effect occurred as the two enchantments—one for fertility and life, one for destruction—mingled together. A strange sentience was born, in the form of a malevolent and vengeful spirit, from the deaths of Sarafine and her beloved garden. This spirit of the garden has no other goal save to terrify and slay all those it encounters in vengeance for what was done all those years ago. It keeps Sarafine within the garden as a lure for its victims, even as she tries to warn them off. In truth, the “beast” fears the child-ghost more than most, as it believes she may one day recall the events that led to the destruction of the garden and her own demise. In doing so the Shadow fears she would reveal its weakness to outsiders, giving them the key to its destruction. Thus it guards her carefully, surrounding her with illusory flowers that she tends with joy and care.

Appearance

The garden ghost appears to its victims and to Sarafine as a vaporous, shifting cloud of black mist that hangs oppressively over the darkest portions of the garden. It has no humanoid form, and maintains the illusion—born of Sarafine’s fear—of being a “beast” to frighten the child-spirit into complete obedience.

Combat

As a ghost, the Garden’s Shadow is immune to all manner of biological spells, can be harmed only by magical weapons of +2 enchantment or higher, and can become invisible and pass through solid objects at will. It rejuvenates to full hit points at will in one round, leaving it unable to perform any action for thirty minutes. The ghost also has the ability to create illusions to fool the sight, smell and touch of its victims (resembling the effects of the 5th-level wizard spell *advanced illusion*). The spirit has used this power to successfully keep Sarafine within the garden walls, tending her roses as if both she and they still lived and flourished. It also has the ability to *cause wounds* for 1d8 points of damage, and can drain the life energy from its victims with a touch, draining 1 level with a successful attack roll. The Shadow’s greatest weakness is its vulnerability to magical fire. The garden was consumed by flames and dark magic centuries past, and can be destroyed again in this same way. The Beast’s greatest fear is that this well-kept secret will be discovered and put to use one day.

Current Sketch

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At present, the garden spirit continues to claim victims who are attracted by the legend of the enchanted garden and its ghostly child caretaker. It has successfully kept Sarafine close at hand and oblivious to her ghostly state and the condition of her surroundings through illusions and fear. No other being has entered the garden in centuries and escaped alive.



Caulden stood and bowed low to the child-ghost as if she were a regal lady and not a thing of mist and shadow—a spectral image of a girl who was long dead and obviously did not realize it. It was all he knew to do. “Do not cry, little one,” he said, hand still on his sword hilt. “After this night, I vow this beast will trouble you no more.”

Sarafine forced a smile onto her face once more. She was touched by his gesture but knew it was useless to warn him away. They all turned out to be the same, in the end, and the beast would have this one as well.



CYRAN DEVICHI

Faith Corrupted by Death

by Charles Phipps
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BIOGRAPHY



yran Devichi was a pious servant of Ezra in life, death, and beyond the grave. His devotion survives even now, but like Devichi himself, it has been corrupted by undeath.

Cyran Devichi

Fledgling Vampire, Lawful Evil

Armor Class	-3	Str	18/63
Movement	12, fl 18	Dex	15
Level/Hit Dice	8+3	Con	16
Hit Points	59	Int	12
THAC0	11	Wis	13
No. of Attacks	1	Cha	15
Damage/Attack	By weapon or 1d6+4		
Special Attacks	See Below		
Special Defenses	See below		
Magic Resistance	Nil		
XP Value	8,000		

Appearance

Cyran looks like a handsome warrior entering the prime of his life. His features are somewhat worn and rugged but not altogether unhandsome. He wears the studded leather armor of a soldier, which often shows the signs of wear and long campaigning. He wears his raven-black hair somewhat long, his skin is pale, and his eyes are a deathly cold blue but for occasional flashes of strong passion. Cyran is also never seen without his broad sword. His voice is cool and seductive but he almost never speaks in these soothing tones, preferring the speech and volume of a firebrand preacher.

Background

Cyran was born in Borca some sixty-seven years ago, the child of devoutly religious followers of the blossoming Church of Ezra. Cyran embraced the faith himself with

extreme zeal and dedicated himself to it with a passion that surprised all that knew him.

At an early age, Cyran decided he would fight for his faith, although he was not a true paladin. His zeal eventually led him to apprentice himself to a wandering warrior, whom he hoped could teach him the skills (but not the habits) of a soldier in preparation for the day he could put them to the Lady's service.

A few years later, when Cyran was eighteen, he and the warrior joined together with a traveling group of Ezra's faithful in the domain of Richemulot, where the group suspected a diabolic presence. In truth it was a nest of creatures that assumed the shape of rats by night and walked like men in the day. Many of the band died that day, including Cyran's mentor, but a few of the creatures were destroyed. Cyran joined with the adventurers for the rest of his life . . . which would be tragically short. After many encounters with the most disgusting of evils, both human and otherwise, Cyran and his companions began tracking a vampire known only the "Lilan."

The Lilan was a man who used his powers to seduce women into carnal pleasures, and left men (often the husbands and fiancées of those whom he seduced) maimed or murdered. Not even bothering to conceal himself, the Lilan confronted the band and questioned them several questions about the reasons behind their pursuit. Neither instantly assaulting them nor trying to terrify them into senselessness, the Lilan merely seemed curious.

Expecting a trap and unsure of what to do, the group stalled for time, trying to pry answers from their foe. Eventually, Cyran could stand it no longer and charged the villain. The battle was swift and in the end all of Cyran's compatriots were martyred in Ezra's service. The Lilan then drained Cyran dry and allowed him to rise again. Horrified by his new state, Cyran clung to his faith (even though the symbol of Ezra burned in his hand like fire) and lay on the ground in a fetal curl, praying with all of his might.

All Cyran was able to do was ask a simple, "Why?". The Lilan explained, in condescending terms, that he had been examining humanity's potential, and out of his

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group Cyran seemed to have the most fire. The Lilan had brought Cyran into undeath simply to see how he would react. The Lilan then left, leaving the newly transformed warrior lying alone. Cyran lay where he was until hunger drove him into the countryside. As fate would have it, a group of sheep thieves were the first to slake his thirst. Though initially disgusted, Cyran eventually rationalized his existence. All things had their place in Ezra's Grand Scheme, so she would not have taken Cyran into this unholy state without some purpose. Cyran refused to associate his own new existence with the monsters he had destroyed in life; surely, they had been cursed by their own actions. Therefore, Cyran decided he was meant to punish the guilty and serve as an example to others, the scourge of Ezra's will.

The young warrior had just crossed the line separation devotion and piety from fanaticism and madness.

Current Sketch

Cyran is unrepentant of his murders, selecting and killing those among humanity he believes deserve to die, and executing them in what he believes to be divine justice. The crimes that are worthy of death in Cyran's eyes can be quite minor, but he looks out particularly for those whom have truly sinned: blasphemers (of Ezra), thieves, adulterers, murderers, and the like. He has only encountered two supernatural creatures besides himself in the time since his crossing into undeath, a werewolf and a vampire only slightly older than himself. He destroyed both of these creatures without mercy.

Still devoutly religious, Cyran moves from town to town as a traveling "judge, jury, and executioner" of evil. He prays on hilltops and other natural places due to the "discomfort" actual holy places cause him. He usually seeks shelter in caves or in the cellars of homes of the faithful (who usually view him nothing more as a wandering preacher and pilgrim with odd habits). Once he has established a lair, he seeks out those whom he will feed upon. In the rare cases when he does not discover someone "worthy" of punishment, he will refrain from feeding, what he considers to be a holy fast. However, Cyran's extremely loose interpretation of the teachings of Ezra means it is very rare for him to find no one worthy of punishment.

Publicly, Cyran presents himself in a very positive light, often making large donations to the churches of Ezra he encounters. He typically tithes 90% or more of his income, all of which is of course taken from his victims. When not seeking victims, he evangelizes at night to all those who will listen to him, and woe be to those who disagree with his depictions of Ezra's wisdom.

Cyran's vampiric nature can be detected not only in the traditional means (no reflection in mirrors, his

aversion to garlic, etc.), but also in that he is unusually prone to stigmata, using a blessed symbol of Ezra he keeps tucked away to burn himself nightly. He keeps these marks hidden, but they are ever-present on his body. The pain they inflict are his ways of showing his devotion.

Combat

The threat Cyran poses in combat is nothing to be trifled with. He possesses all the traditional vampiric powers save the power to transform into mist; instead he can turn into a flock of ravens, an ability believed inherited from his sire. Any stake driven through his heart must be made of ash; wood from any other tree has no effect, another benefit believed to be inherited from the Lilan.

Cyran specializes in the broadsword (+1 bonus to use, +2 to damage). His blade was actually created by an anchorite from the Nevuchar Spring sect, a failed attempt to create a holy avenger. Cyran managed to acquire the sword, believing his faith would make it pure. The blade acts as a broadsword +1 and radiates *protection from good* when held by any evil-aligned being.

Those who examine the sword closely will see the numerous flaws in the runes and symbols inscribed upon it, the priest's faith having been somewhat in question by the time of the final enchantment. However, Cyran is totally convinced that it is as holy as he has "made it to be." Cyran is also proficient in nearly a dozen other weapon types which he has trained extensively in since his transformation, including the crossbow, dagger, longbow, mace, morningstar, and most sword types. He usually only has one of these weapons on him at any given time, but should he acquire a magical weapon from those he slays he is likely to be skilled in it.

Due to his association with the Lady of the Shield a lawful evil priest of Ezra has a +2 bonus in attempting to control Cyran. On the other hand, the vampire enjoys a +2 bonus to resisting any turning attempts by a good or neutral anchorite. The bonus also applies to those simply presenting Ezra's symbol against him.

Cyran's touch is especially dangerous, draining Strength from those he battles. With every successful attack he makes with his bare hands, he permanently drains 1 point of Strength from his target. However, he prefers to wield his sword in melee, and will use his draining touch only when he needs to feed.

Cyran will not fight any forces he believes to be "totally pure," preferring to retreat instead. However, this is extremely rare; Cyran may rationalize attacking those who actually are pure by convincing himself their faith is false and any true warrior of Ezra would recognize the personal mission granted him by the Guardian in the Mists.

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Adventure Hooks

- ❖ The heroes discover that a man suspected of stealing from a local temple of Ezra has been found brutally beaten to death and drained of all of his blood, though the latter may not be immediately obvious due to the severity of the wounds. Several more bodies begin to turn up, and in each case, some untold sin comes to light about the victim. These “sins” may involve others, who will themselves soon be killed. Cyran has decided that due to the “absolute blasphemy” of the thief he recently slew, something truly wicked must be festering. He has decided to wage a one-man inquisition on the local populace to root out the source of this “evil.” While secretly preying upon these “sinners,” Cyran will publicly rail against those who have “brought this terror upon us all” in his guise as an itinerant preacher. Any and every theft, liaison, swindle, lie, or other questionable act will soon set the townspeople against one another as they more and more desperately try to uncover the source of the killings. While Cyran thrives in this atmosphere of paranoia, the heroes must put a stop to him—before they appear on his list of sinners.
- ❖ Cyran and the Lilan have both arrived in the same city. This could be coincidence, or the machinations of the elder vampire. Two sets of corpses have begun to pile up: half the victims are considered “sinners” and rogues, while the other half are generally considered to be the moral backbone of the city. Cyran alone recognizes that the Lilan is slaying those who will not succumb to his evil, and soon shifts his hunt from mortal sinners to Lilan, quite possibly the first goal truly in accordance with Ezra’s will he has pursued since his transformation. Unfortunately anyone strong enough to resist the Lilan’s seduction thus becomes fair game for Cyran. Since the heroes are unlikely to suspect two independent vampires, their chances of stopping either becomes markedly slim. The heroes may also face a new menace if Cyran decides that he must create a “pure” ally to join his quest against the Lilan. Or even worse, that the Lilan takes the same interest in one of the heroes that he did with Cyran.
- ❖ The party has been overwhelmed by an evil creature when Cyran comes to their rescue, destroying it utterly. Weakened, the heroes are taken by the vampire to someplace safe (assuming they do not blaspheme in the interim). Their savior then leaves as mysteriously as he arrived. These events may play themselves out several times, with the unprepared heroes being rescued by this mysterious and helpful figure. The heroes may begin to slowly unravel Cyran’s past and develop sympathy for him. Indeed

Cyran may come to respect and trust the heroes as well, assuming all are faithful and good, and eventually reveals himself and offers himself as an ally. The heroes must then decide what to do about their ally when his murderous dark side comes to light.

- ❖ Cyran’s grip on his sanity has grown perilous. As he grows in power as a vampire, he has become more and more delusional, imagining himself to be Ezra’s “chosen one.” Indeed, he has even begun to see hallucinatory visions, and as his madness deepens he even comes to believe he has been granted the power to raise the dead (in truth, nothing more than the transformation of his victims into more undead like himself). The vampire’s wickedness has grown strong enough to attract the attention of the local domain lord (who notices Cyran virtually ruling over a small town). The heroes are therefore hired by the lord to investigate and “debunk” Cyran’s rapidly growing religious movement. Assuming the heroes discover the horrifying truth behind Cyran’s movement, they must somehow escape with the information or try and break his cult-like hold on the populace, now maintained by religious devotion and pandemic use of his *charm* gaze. Those who attack Cyran directly may find him a deadly dangerous foe; given his new gifts . . .

Xe

ELENI OF TOYALIS

The Heir-Apparent of Hazlan

by Steve Miller
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BIOGRAPHY

Although charming and intelligent, Eleni of Toyalis is evil to the core. She willingly serves one of the most evil spellcasters in the Demiplane of Dread, helping him toward a goal that she hopes will lead to the genocide of an entire people.

Eleni of Toyalis

Apprentice to Hazlik the Red Wizard
6th-level Human Invoker, Neutral Evil

Armor Class	10	Str	10
Movement	12	Dex	13
Level/Hit Dice	6	Con	12
Hit Points	19	Int	18
THAC0	19	Wis	14
No. of Attacks	1	Cha	15
Damage/Attack	By weapon or spell		
Special Attacks	Spells (5/3/3)		
Special Defenses	<i>Stoneskin</i> , cast at 12th level (protects from 8 attacks)		
Magic Resistance	Nil		

Appearance

Eleni is an exotic beauty, with hawkish facial features. She stands just over 5' in height and has the dusky skin and dark eyes of all Rashemi, the racial and ethnic group to which she belongs. However, her head is shaven and covered with elaborate tattoos that flow from her scalp and onto her shoulders and chest. Typically, such fashion is reserved only for Mulans, the dominant ethnic group in Hazlan, and Rashemi and Mulans alike are often scandalized when they first meet her. More disturbing to many, many of her tattoos resemble magical sigils, but no one has been able to discern what their significance is.

Background

Eleni was born to laborers in Toyalis. She spent her childhood dreaming of a life where she and other Rashemi didn't have to bow and scrape for the effete, tattooed Mulans. Shortly before her sixteenth birthday, after she watched her father be forced to wash the mud from a Mulan woman's boots with his finest shirt, she decided she would bow no longer. She went into the street and resolved that she would make any Mulan she met step aside from her path rather than she stepping aside from his. If she was attacked by one of the oppressors, she would die fighting him.

The first Mulan she encountered was Lord Hazlan, the supreme master of her homeland. Still, the rebellious teen kept her resolve. Rather than ordering her slain, Hazlan struck up a conversation with her. Within ten minutes, he invited her to travel with him to the village Ramulai, where he would subject her tests, and, if she proved to have an aptitude for magic, he would take her on as an apprentice.

Eleni proved to have a strong talent for sorcery. She quickly took to the arcane arts, and eventually mastered them to the point where Hazlik permitted her to help in the instruction of apprentices. Further, the old wizard and the young woman grew to be fast friends, as it soon became apparent that they both despised the Mulans. He confided in Eleni that some of their number humiliated him to a degree that still tortures him to this very day. When Eleni suggested that she should adopt Mulan dress and fashion to spite them, Hazlik loved the idea. Not only did it mock the Mulan beliefs, but he saw it as the first step along a path that he had been scouting for years, a path to revenge over Mulan everywhere.

Eleni was tattooed both with traditional Mulan tattoos but also with magical sigils of Hazlik's own creation. Hazlik was so delighted in the scandal that her new appearance caused that he started giving her political power, even allowing her to sit at his side when he meets with council of advisors. No one dares criticize her openly, and Eleni's word is now considered to be equal in weight to that of Hazlik himself. There are even whispered rumors that she is the aging wizard lord's lover, chosen heir, or both. Those who have dared to

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question the propriety of either Eleni or Hazlik have all vanished without trace shortly after doing so.

The truth is that Eleni is indeed Hazlik's appointed heir and his most trusted confidant. They share a love like that which exists between father and daughter, but there is nothing more physical and romantic about it. Together, they are executing a complicated plan of epic scope that will send shock waves through the Domains and perhaps even across the Multiverse when it is completed.

Their goal is nothing less than the complete genocide of all Mulan everywhere, both in the Demiplane of Dread and on the world of Toril, Hazlik's place of origin. Eleni is as of yet unaware of Hazlik's complete plan, but she suspects that some of the magical sigils upon her body relate to it. Hazlik has promised that her part in the plan is an important one and when it is executed, he will see that she becomes lord of a transformed Hazlan.

Personality

Eleni is charming and personable . . . when she wants to be. She takes an almost pathological delight in shocking others and will frequently behave in an overtly provocative fashion. She is well-educated and her quick wit makes her a good conversationalist and a convincing orator, particularly when she keeps her impulse toward sarcasm in check. If she is trying to win someone over to her point of view, she is a hard person to dislike, something which even those who find her an affront to traditional Hazlani life have to admit. However, there are few that might find her an affront that she is really interested in convincing to provide her with willing cooperation; in fact, these are the very people she takes the greatest delight in shocking.

Combat

Eleni is not much of a fighter and tries to keep herself out of physical combat. If confronted by characters intent on attacking her, she relies on the protection of her bodyguards (1st-level fighters armed with short swords and whips, 1d6+1 are with her at all times, although at least six are present if she is expecting trouble) and retreats away from melee. She then uses her spells to assist her guardians in defeating the enemy. Most of these guards are Rashemi whom Eleni has known since childhood.

Eleni has a number of defenses at her disposal, including a ring of mind shielding and a ring of regeneration that were given to her by Hazlik. Additionally, one of the tattoos that adorn her grants a 15% magic resistance to all hostile magic. If she takes more than 4 points of damage from a single attack from

an edged weapon, however, there is a 20% chance the tattoo is damaged and ceases to function.

Typically Memorized Spells: 1st level—*chill touch*, *comprehend languages*, *magic missile* (x2), *shield*; 2nd level—*ESP*, *invisibility*, *spectral hand*; 3rd level—*Melf's minute meteors*, *tongues*, *wraithform*.

Special Equipment: Ring of mind shielding, ring of regeneration



THE KNOX FAMILY

Vermin Among Nobility, Nobility Among Vermin

by Wes Schneider
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INTRODUCTION

There has been a long-running joke among the nobility of the city of Nosos that the only things more disgusting than the city's rodents are its peasants. August and Iris Knox have proven that this joke is horribly wrong. But the Knox siblings have not always been the loathsome creatures they are today; some might say that what they were was even worse.

What They Were . . .

August Knox was born the first son of one of the several families of Nosos that had the money and influence to call themselves nobility. The Knox family had made a sizable fortune from the export of coal and precious ores from the local mines and as such was able to spoil young August with everything the boy demanded. From an early age Knox gained an extraordinary impatience and learned that the wishes of others were secondary to his own as his wealthy parents doted on him.

For the first six years of his life young August merely terrorized the house staff, threatening to have his father remove them if they showed any disapproval in his mean-spirited jokes. However, his spoiled life swiftly ended with the birth of his sister Iris on his seventh birthday.

With a new baby to fawn over, August's parents spent consistently less time on him and their gifts became fewer and fewer. For the first time in his life, young Knox was not the center of attention and also for the first time the boy knew true anger. Iris became the new brunt of August's pranks within a day of her birth.

As the siblings grew so did their vices. August's need for recognition caused his stunts to become more elaborate and malicious with each passing year. When throwing his parent's books into the fire no longer gained him the attention he desired, throwing in the family cat did.

Iris too gained the bad habits of her brother and within a few short years after she had become the queen

of the house, lording her rule over her servants and parents with screams of rage or faked tears, depending on her desires. But despite their equally bad behavior the siblings never grew a fondness for one another; in fact each of the Knox children came to deeply resent the other.

Once August reached his eighteenth year he began attending the frequent masquerade balls held by the other noble families of the city. He never missed a ball and found that by hosting masquerades he could gain the attention of not just his family but the entire noble class. Soon August began pouring a great deal of money into creating the most elaborate, controversial, or repulsive costumes the people of Nosos had ever seen and thus gained the acclaim he had desired for so long.

Iris, seeing the growing popularity of her brother, dedicated herself to showing the masses what a needy fool he truly was. Despite the fact that her brother was several years her senior Iris had always been the more studious of the two siblings and possessed a degree of skill at manipulation which eluded August. Also, using money she had stolen from her parents, she had acquired a book of many lesser magical rites. Most of these spells were little more than tricks and sleight of hand, but there were several Iris hoped to be able to use someday. Deciding to put her skills to use, Iris began sabotaging her brother's beloved costumes and verbally attacking him in front of his friends, both of which enraged August to no end.

The cunning girl began offering dares to her brother and laying bets against him and his friends, hoping to expose his empty words and deeds. However, with each proposal she was disappointed, her brother using her mean-spirited jests to gain more attention and more approval. Soon it was a well-known fact that there was nothing August Knox would not do on a dare.

The turning point for both of the siblings' lives came on their mutual birthday, which marked Iris' entrance into womanhood. To celebrate Iris' sixteenth year and August's twenty-third the Knox family threw their own masquerade ball and invited all the noble families of Nosos to attend.

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The revelries went on long into the night and by midnight the remaining attendees, including August, had become quite drunk. As conversation normally did at the masquerades, talk gradually turned to the superiority of the nobility and the general loathing felt towards the lower class. Speaking with more alcohol than sense August made the analogy that the noble class were the masterful lions of society while the lesser classes were merely weak rodents, to be used and devoured at a whim. Iris, her cunning mind working swiftly after hearing her brother's slurred speech, saw her chance to ruin him. Calling upon August she asked how strongly he believed what he had said—or was it merely the wine strengthening his tongue? August professed his wholehearted belief in his words. Leaving the ballroom for but a moment Iris returned bearing a single dead rat. Again she called upon her brother and demanded that he prove for the watching eyes of all of Nosos that he believed his words wholeheartedly and was not just a simple braggart.

Goaded on by his sister and the hundreds of watching eyes August had little choice but to do what his sister had asked. However, after a tentative bite, he found the creature was not dead, but instead strangely stunned. The young noble attempted to decline but by that point the urges of his sister and the crowd had become shouts of approval. Without a second thought August, his disgust hidden behind his mask, completed the revolting task. And thus the lives both of the Knox children had known ended.

What They Are . . .

The creature had been lurking very close to the gates of Knox manor, intending to follow a drunken guest and make the unfortunate reveler its meal for the night when a strange, overwhelming urge to sleep overtook the accursed vermin.

Iris had never expected that August would actually go through with what she had proposed, she had even used one of the only spells she had mastered to make sure of that. But even as she watched her brother consume the rat, sleeping due to her magic, she had no idea what she had done. The curse of lycanthropy normally takes days, even months to first manifest itself. In August Knox it took mere minutes.

August's costume concealed his transformation until he fell screaming to the floor. Those that moved to aid him were lashed out at by the black rending claws that had once been the young noble's hands. With a rat-like hiss, the newly born wererat, confused and outnumbered, crashed through a nearby window and disappeared into the night.

Later that night, after the horrified and despondent guests had left, the creature that had been August Knox

returned to the Knox estate. Thinking only of revenge the unnatural creature climbed the manor walls and broke into Iris' chambers. August attempted to murder his conniving sister but her cries swiftly summoned the manor's guards and their father. Blaming his parents and their perceived neglect for his new curse, August slaughtered his father before his sister's eyes and warned that she would follow. Before the guards could surround the creature, August raced into the night.

In the days following August's change, more sadness rained onto the Knox estate. Unwilling to live without her husband and broken by the change in her son, the siblings' suffering mother lapsed into melancholy and died three days later, leaving Iris heir to the Knox fortunes. But Iris could not enjoy her new fortune, for now every rat in the vermin-infested city of Nosos bore the face of her brother, whom she knew would try to claim his revenge.

Current Sketch

Iris Knox

1st-Level Human Mage, Neutral Evil

Armor Class	9	Str	6
Movement	12	Dex	16
Level/Hit Dice	1	Con	9
Hit Points	7	Int	17
THAC0	20	Wis	11
No. of Attacks	1	Cha	11
Damage/Attack	By weapon		
Special Attacks	Spells (1)		
Special Defenses	Nil		
Magic Resistance	Nil		

Since the demise of her parents, and with the threat of her own death hanging constantly over her head, Iris has been hiring mercenaries to form her personal bodyguard. Though she has not left the Knox estate since her brother's change, and has no intention of doing so until his threat to her is ended, she has had notices placed throughout the city requesting skilled swordsmen for her bodyguard and offering a reward for August Knox, dead or alive.

Iris now spends her days huddled in the inner rooms of the Knox estate, praying that her brother might be found and slain so she might return to her privileged life. It seems that the death of her parents and her brother's change has affected her young mind in some dire way; she is now known to mutter to herself from time to time and seems to forget the presence of others nearby. Also, no one has seen the young heiress eat or attend to herself in the weeks since the masquerade. Iris does not seem to feel any personal guilt for her brother's change, but it remains to be seen if she truly knew the rat she gave her

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brother was a cursed creature, or if it was merely a terrible twist of fate.

Description

Iris has only recently passed into womanhood and as such is still awkward in form and stature. Standing a scant few inches past five feet, Iris is a plain girl with no truly extraordinary features. She wears her long blonde hair tied back tightly a long ponytail, much like her mother did. Her eyes are blue, much like the majority of the people of Nosos, yet in the time since the masquerade they have taken on a wild and nervous aspect. Her long stares are most unnerving to those few who still have dealings with the young Knox heiress.

Though only those who attended the fateful masquerade would notice, Iris continues to wear the gown she wore at the ball that altered her life. The gown is black, streaked with white stripes from the waist down and random groups of white stars and moons above. Even though the gown is of an excellent design and quality it was never meant for the extended use it has endured. As such the skirt is tearing in several places and the white designs in the gown are slowly turning gray with collected grime. At this rate it seems that the gown may waste away completely soon if not properly attended to. Ironically, the same seems true of the gown's wearer.

August Knox

Wererat, Chaotic Evil

Armor Class	10 (6)	Str	15
Movement	12	Dex	10
Level/Hit Dice	3+1	Con	12
Hit Points	14	Int	9
THAC0	17	Wis	11
No. of Attacks	1	Cha	16
Damage/Attack	By weapon		
Special Attacks	Surprise		
Special Defenses	Hit only by +1 or silver		
Special Vulnerabilities	Silver		
Magic Resistance	Nil		

Since August's transformation into a lycanthrope he has become everything that he had always been taught to hate. He now roams the streets as an outcast, poor, lonely, and often hungry, burning with hatred for the sister who cast him not just from the ranks of nobility but from the very ranks of humanity.

Every night, after he feeds on any poor unfortunate that crosses his path, he passes by his family home, remembering with longing and hatred that which he endured. He has noticed a growing number of guards on the property of his former estate and as such does not dare to lay siege to the place as he did before. For a short

time he was content to watch and know that his sister feared his return and could do nothing but bar the gates against him. But waiting already begins to bore the young noble as he suffers from his own torture. Desiring attention, yet being forced to stay hidden, has ignited August's temper and now he only waits for the perfect moment to strike.

In his new form August has found that he has the ability to transform from his human shape to a half-man half-rat hybrid when he pleases, gaining all of the abilities and vulnerabilities of a normal wererat. Though he has heard tales of creatures like himself roaming the city he fears seeking them out. This may be because he still clings to a deep-rooted hope that by disposing of his sister he might gain back the life that he has truly lost forever.

Description

When human, August still bears the dashing good looks and bearing of his noble heritage, but now the dirt and smell of the filthy streets of Nosos hide those features. Knowing that his sister and others are hunting him as a monster, he hides himself under layers of reeking cloth and for all purposed appears to be a leper. August accentuates this look by begging to those he passes. His unthreatening appearance has allowed him to surprise victims much more quickly than standard hunting methods when needs be.

When in his rat hybrid form, August's bones and skin contort, stretching his face into that of a giant rat, covering his body with filthy matted fur, extending his hands into blackened claws, and producing a long rodent like tail. Though he stands only five feet tall in this form his monstrous features and gleaming red eyes are enough to invoke fear in the people of Nosos, who already tell stories of the noble vermin who stalks them on the streets.



LIGHTS IN THE FOG

New Champions of the Mists

by Andrew Cermak
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INTRODUCTION

The Demiplane of Dread is a dangerous place, with precious few places to turn for relief. Evil is everywhere. You can try to flee, but to no avail; the creatures in the night need not follow you, because wherever you turn, they are already there. In a land such as this, every solitary individual one meets who is willing to provide sanctuary or give succor is an incredibly precious resource, rarer than sapphires and many times more valuable. Presented here are a handful of those rare, precious individuals.

Comte Tomas d'Aloure

7th-Level Human Fighter, Lawful Good			
Armor Class	10	Str	15
Movement	12	Dex	13
Level/Hit Dice	7	Con	12
Hit Points	38	Int	16
THAC0	14	Wis	15
Morale	12	Cha	17
No. of Attacks	3/2		
Damage/Attack	By weapon		
Special Attacks	None		
Special Defenses	Magic ring (see below)		
Magic Resistance	Nil		

COMTE TOMAS D'ALOURE

Appearance

Though recently he has not been looking well, the Comte remains a handsome and dashing man. He is in his late thirties, but his hair remains dark black with not a hint of gray, neatly trimmed in an almost military fashion. He is in excellent shape, strong and athletic, but his current nervousness and anxiety makes him appear less healthy than he actually is, almost frail; he sometimes appears as if a strong wind might snap him in two. He is somewhat small in stature, standing just over 5'6", but his charisma makes him seem taller. The lines that frame his eyes betray the ease with which he smiles, but that smile is now seen only fleetingly. His features are sharp and chiseled, adorned with a small goatee and a pencil-thin mustache; he has some difficulty growing facial hair. He usually wears the currently fashionable dark woolen pants, silk shirts and tailed coats of Dementlieu's gentry, but eschews the also popular top hats, which he believes look ridiculous. He always wears a signet ring passed down in his family from father to son for generations; it bears a stylized letter A, the seal of the d'Aloures.

Background

Comte Tomas d'Aloure was born in 712 into the aristocracy of Dementlieu. A century ago in Dementlieu's (false) history, the d'Aloures were among the most powerful and influential of Dementlieu's noble families, but in recent years the emergence of Dementlieu's middle class and the increasing political power of the office of Lord-Governor combined to push most of Dementlieu's noble families into the background, the d'Aloures among them. However, while the title of Comte now has little official power to accompany it, the d'Aloures have remained a very respected and very wealthy family, and Tomas was born the sole heir of the family name.

The d'Aloure name flourished under Tomas' guidance. Tomas was charismatic, genteel, and generous, and accordingly became quite popular with both the upper and lower classes. D'Aloure's growing popularity attracted the attention of Dominic d'Honaire, who felt that someone of d'Aloure's popularity and corresponding influence would make him a useful member of the Obedient. D'Aloure was invited, along with many others of Dementlieu's upper crust, to a banquet at the Lord-Governor's palace in Port-a-Lucine. During the banquet, d'Honaire spoke personally with many of the guests, and many of those whom he deemed "worthy" were hypnotically conditioned to become Obedient.

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Eventually, d'Honaire came to d'Aloure, and engaged the charming nobleman in conversation, while at the same time attempting to dig his hypnotic hooks into d'Aloure's mind. Then, an astonishing thing happened.

D'Honaire failed. D'Aloure's mind was unassailable.

Though he hid it well, continuing with the meaningless pleasantries of his conversation with d'Aloure, d'Honaire was both enraged and apprehensive over his failure to conquer d'Aloure's will. Never before had he failed so completely to invade the subconscious of an individual, and the stone wall around d'Aloure's psyche worried him greatly. Somehow, he reasoned, d'Aloure must have expected Dominic's attempt to dominate him and made preparations against it; perhaps d'Aloure might even be an agent of his rival, the mysterious criminal known only as the Brain. D'Honaire excused himself, and Lord-Governor Guignol quite suddenly declared the banquet to be at an end.

The truth behind d'Aloure's immunity to d'Honaire's hypnosis is the signet ring he wears. Though he does not know it, the ring is a powerful variation of a *ring of mind shielding*. The Ring of the d'Aloures not only makes its wearer immune to such spells as *ESP* or *detect lie*, but also immune to all attempts to *charm* or otherwise take over the will of the wearer, whether the attempt is magical, psychic, or mundane hypnosis.

Current Sketch

Ever since the banquet three years ago, d'Aloure's life has taken many turns for the worse. Only a few weeks afterward, his wife Sara died of an unknown illness. His friends began to avoid him, and he found himself suddenly blacklisted from most social events. Most of his servants abandoned him. Eventually, what started as ostracism turned into outright antagonism. He dares not leave his estate outside Port-a-Lucine for any significant length of time, as he has been physically accosted by commoners the last few times he has stepped out. The Comte is absolutely bewildered as to why those who loved him and called him friend have now completely closed their doors to him, and has no idea why the lower classes now seem to hate him so.

The reason, of course, is d'Honaire, who has used his influence and the many Obedient under his command to make d'Aloure's life as hellish as possible while he attempts to ascertain exactly what d'Aloure's game is. He was also responsible for the death of d'Aloure's wife, using one of d'Aloure's own servants to poison her. D'Aloure, for his part, is completely oblivious to d'Honaire's involvement in his current situation; even if d'Honaire's involvement were suggested to him, he would be unable to imagine why d'Honaire would hate him so. Still, he is convinced that there is some manner

of conspiracy against him, and he is very interested in discovering its nature.

Personality

Under normal circumstances, Tomas d'Aloure is charming, urbane, and genteel. Unfortunately, circumstances are anything but normal for d'Aloure these days. He is growing increasingly suspicious and paranoid, and with good reason: Dominic d'Honaire is systematically dismantling his life. On the few occasions he has non-hostile company, he tries to act as if everything as well, but only the most obtuse individual could fail to see this for the facade it is; his apprehension shows in his every word and gesture.

D'Aloure is a smart man, and it is clear to him that someone is orchestrating the sudden turnaround in his life. Though he does not know why anyone would do such a thing, the list of who could accomplish it is very short. He had determined to seek aid in determining for certain who it is, after which he will act. Decisively.

Combat

Comte d'Aloure has the standard combat abilities of a 7th-level fighter. His preferred weapon is the rapier; he is also proficient with the use of smokepowder weapons. He almost never wears armor; among gentlemen, it's simply not done.

Using Comte Thomas d'Aloure

If they are of good reputation, d'Aloure will likely approach the characters first. He knows of only a few individuals with the power to so completely ruin his life, but he doesn't know how to proceed to discover the culprit. Thus, he has determined to seek out skilled investigators to do it for him.

Why doesn't he just employ Alanik Ray, the Great Detective of Port-a-Lucine? That's a good question, and one the Dungeon Master will have to answer. Maybe Ray is busy with other cases (perhaps still investigating Van Richten's disappearance?), or maybe d'Aloure did approach Ray, and Ray hires the party to do the legwork for him.

At any rate, d'Aloure presents the unknowing characters with the opportunity to match wits with Dominic d'Honaire, the darklord of Dementlieu. If they are clever enough, they may be able to discern the hypnotist's tight control over the domain. D'Aloure will aid them in anyway he can; in addition to being a competent fighter, he is well-versed in the political and social scenery of Dementlieu, and can provide them with much valuable information.

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CONSTABLE STURM ANDROV

Appearance

Sturm Androv is a physically imposing man, standing 6'4" with broad shoulders and a barrel chest. He has a wide nose and a heavily dimpled chin. His dirty blond hair is thick and curly, as is his bushy mustache. As constable of Kantora, he usually wears ring mail and carries a club and shield. He also has a fondness for hats, and wears one at all times.

Given his rough appearance, others tend to be surprised by how intelligent and well-spoken he is. It is this intelligence that has made him a successful constable, not his brawn.

Constable Sturm Androv

10th-Level Human Fighter, Lawful Good

Armor Class	6	Str	16
Movement	12	Dex	12
Level/Hit Dice	10	Con	16
Hit Points	56	Int	15
THACO	11	Wis	14
Morale	14	Cha	10
No. of Attacks	3/2		
Damage/Attack	By weapon		
Special Attacks	Nil		
Special Defenses	Nil		
Magic Resistance	Nil		

Background

"You're sure it was him?"

Sergeant Magiyev nodded. "There were . . . *things* done to the body. Just like with the others. And the writing is there."

Constable Androv sighed. A light rain pattered against the wide brim of his hat as he looked at the ramshackle facade that poorly concealed one of the most popular bordellos of this seamy side of Kantora. It was something of a minor miracle that this "establishment" had not been victimized in the past. Of course, it was that lack of victimization that had probably made it so popular in the first place.

"We should have shut these places down years ago. Cut this bastard off at the source."

Sergeant Magiyev shook his head. "You know better than anyone that it's just not possible. Not only would it take more men than we've got to close the bordellos, it would put the lower classes in an uproar. And the whores would just go underground anyway. It'd make it harder to keep tabs on this maniac."

Androv spit on the cobblestones. "He's laughing at us. He gets more brazen every time. We've got to do something, Ivan. I'm sick of seeing women butchered.

"No pattern, no witnesses, not even one gods-damned scream. Just once I'd like us to find one of these girls before the blood's dried. Any idea how long this one's been here?"

"At least several hours. Blood's already turning brown . . . and there was a lot of it."

"Take me to it. I want to have a look around."

Sergeant Magiyev led him through the doorway into the dilapidated halls. They passed several hysterical queans, patiently being questioned by guardsmen who looked decidedly uncomfortable. They also passed a young guardsman being comforted by an older one; the young man's face was a disturbing shade of green, and tear trails were streaking down his face. Androv cursed under his breath. This was hardly the place for a new recruit.

Magiyev took him to the end of one of the halls, to a shadowed room where several of his men busily but carefully took notes and searched for evidence.

Androv stepped into the room. "Out. Everyone. Sergeant Magiyev and I will take it from here."



Androv swallowed heavily as he looked at the grisly spectacle on the bed. This was by far the worst he'd seen, though he knew he'd seen only a fraction of this madman's work. The remains were barely recognizable as human, the face unidentifiable . . . and scrawled over the body in blood was the gruesome epitaph:

SHEEZ A PRITEE WUN, AINT SHE LADZ?

Sergeant Magiyev broke the silence. "He's either getting crazier or cockier."

Androv smirked. "Both. Men like this don't just get better. They always get worse. And Bane knows we've given him reason enough to get cocky. Twenty years I've been constable of Kantora, appointed by Prince Othmar with the endorsement of Sir Tristen Hiregaard, with catching this man my number one priority. Twenty years, and we have barely the slightest shred of hard evidence.

"It shouldn't be possible. How can a man kill so often and never leave a single witness?"

Magiyev shrugged. "Could be there have been witnesses. People in the slums aren't very forthcoming with the guardsmen, and even less so when it comes to murderers. Fellow who'd do this surely'd have no problem gutting a snitch."

Androv shook his head. "Too pat. Too simple. I've been chasing him for twenty years as constable, and ten or

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so before that as a guardsman, but he's been killing for a much longer time now . . . since Hiregaard was still personally leading the guard. That's what? Sixty years? Seventy?"

Magiyev nodded slowly. This was the aspect of the case that made everyone nervous.

"And he's hit every major city in Nova Vaasa in that time. What's all that say to you, Ivan?"

Magiyev didn't even pause to think. "More than one man, sir. Copycats. The original's probably been dead for decades."

Androv nodded. "That would certainly seem logical, on the face of it. But tell me, Ivan; how is it that we've never caught a single one of these copycats? How possible does it seem that everyone who chooses to imitate this fiend is equally stealthy, equally clever and equally slippery . . . and, incidentally, can perfectly imitate his handwriting and grammar, such as it is, despite the fact that we've never released his 'statements' to the public?"

Magiyev sighed. "Not very likely at all, sir."

"No, not very likely at all. Bloody impossible, I should say."

Androv looked up from the body, staring Magiyev in the eyes. "We're dealing with something inhuman here, Ivan. Gods help us all."

"Now let's get her out of here."

Current Sketch

Sturm Androv is the constable of the Kantora City Guard. He is therefore responsible for the prevention of and solving of crimes within the city. It should therefore come as no surprise that much of his resources are committed to apprehending the murderer known as Malken.

Of course, Malken is not the only criminal that Androv must deal with. Malken does not kill every day, or even every month. Therefore, the majority of Androv's time is taken up with other crimes. Of course, as constable, he only gets personally involved in the most serious of crimes within the city. Regardless of what case he is currently working on, however, any new developments involving Malken garner his immediate attention.

Personality

Sturm Androv is gruff and no-nonsense; his lack of humor is legendary among the city guardsmen. He tends to be somewhat surly; his fellow guardsmen know that this bad temper is a result of the deep responsibility he feels to the people and city of Kantora. His failure to apprehend Malken weighs heavily upon his mind. He

will do anything to stop the madman from taking another life.

Androv is for the most part honest and forthright as constable, but his experiences as a guardsmen have taught him that principles must sometimes be sacrificed in the name of practicality. Kantora has little in the way of civil rights protection as it is, so Androv is generally free to deal with criminals as he sees fit. He and his guardsmen have little compunction about roughing up accused criminals, especially violent ones.

Combat

Sturm Androv has the standard combat abilities of a 10th-level fighter. He rarely has to enter combat if he doesn't wish to, however; anyone wanting to attack him will have to wade through the half-dozen or so guardsmen that accompany him most of the time.

Using Constable Sturm Androv

Even though Androv is a very busy man, he doesn't take kindly to vigilantes trying to ease his workload. Therefore, anyone who plans to investigate any other crimes in Kantora had better get his permission. If he finds the adventurers trustworthy, intelligent and competent, he will welcome whatever help they can give him. If the characters aid him in solving a difficult case or apprehending a dangerous criminal, they will earn his respect, and will return the favor in whatever way he can. As constable of Kantora, he can be a valuable ally.

FATHER LUKAS DUREMKE

Appearance

Father Lukas looks nothing like the typical Banite priest. Eschewing pomposity, he tends to wear simple, sturdy clothing much like those worn by laborers or farmers. He is short (5'7") and stout, with chestnut brown hair, hazel eyes and a calm expression and demeanor.

Background

Lukas Duremke was born in a Nova Vaasan hamlet which was little more than a trading outpost for travelers between Egertus and the domains to the north. The small village had a great deal in common with its Tepestani neighbors; the people were insular, provincial and very much concerned with tradition, almost

Father Lukas Duremke

7th-Level Human Priest of Bane, Lawful Good
Armor Class 10 **Str** 12

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Movement	12	Dex	11
Level/Hit Dice	7	Con	11
Hit Points	29	Int	16
THACO	16	Wis	18
Morale	12	Cha	15
No. of Attacks	1		
Damage/Attack	1d2		
Special Attacks	Spells		
Special Defenses	Spells		
Magic Resistance	Nil		

puritanically so. Lukas' family was no different, and Lukas grew up with a healthy dose of rules and religion. The worship of Bane, in particular, was an important part of Lukas' upbringing.

Lukas' parents were firm followers of Bane, and Lukas was raised with the same devotion. The concepts of justice, hard work, and responsibility espoused by the village's lone preacher struck a chord within Lukas, and he accepted them wholeheartedly.

Lukas helped his father farm as a young boy, but when Lukas reached the age of twelve his parents decided to seek out an apprenticeship for him. The family was growing larger (Lukas was the oldest of six) and there was simply not enough food and money to go around, and a local apprenticeship would have helped ease some of the burden. Lukas, however, had other plans, and used what little money he had saved up to buy transport to Egertus, where he planned to study to become a Banite priest.

Unfortunately, things did not go as simply as he had hoped. Lukas was unable to read, and unable to afford schooling to learn how. It hadn't even occurred to him that this would prove a barrier; even the village preacher had been illiterate, and it had not kept him from sermonizing. The local clergymen (who awed Lukas with their ornate dress and magnificent cathedral, completely unlike anything he had seen at home) were unwilling to take in a backwoods boy who could barely even read a few words of Bane's multitudinous scriptures.

Lukas proved stubborn, however, and the priests decided to at least give the boy a temporary home in the cathedral, where he was put to work at cleaning and maintenance duties. Meanwhile, Lukas took it upon himself to overcome his handicaps. The boy was possessed of a keen intelligence which had seen little opportunity to express itself on the farm, and over the next year his agile mind was able to take the few words he did recognize in Bane's scripture and expand them to a fairly competent level.

And what he read shocked him.

The Bane of these books was almost nothing like the Bane he had come to know at home. This Bane cared nothing for true justice from what Lukas could see, instead using the word as a weapon to keep the weak in

line. This Bane cared for hard work only when it benefited the powerful, who were free to walk across the workers' backs. This Bane cared only for the responsibility of the ruled to the ruler, and not the ruler to the ruled. This Bane was a stranger.

For a brief moment Lukas' faith was shattered. Then, he decided that the writings must be false.

Lukas was perhaps imprudently vocal about his opinions, and after repeated beatings and canings he was thrown out of the cathedral at the age of fifteen. If anything, this only increased Lukas' fervor and indignation. He had grown contemptuous of the pampered priests and their hypocritical doctrines, and on the street corners of Egertus he began proclaiming it. Loudly. He criticized them to any who would listen for the wealth they hoarded while people starved on the streets, for the shroud of mystery they dogmatically worked to keep between the people and their god, and for their blind obedience to a status quo that kept the Nova Vaasan people in squalor.

Though quite young, Lukas was also charismatic and a good speaker, and his message of corruption and the need for reform was exactly what many of the people wanted to hear. Though he was chased from Egertus by the city guard for his heresy, barely escaping with his life, he traveled across the domain, preaching the word of Bane as he felt it truly was. He has since crusaded throughout Nova Vaasa and even into Hazlan, and has acquired a small but devoted following despite the many attempts to silence him.

Current Sketch

Lukas' Reformation movement has not exactly caught on like wildfire, but the 22 followers he has converted are extremely devoted, sometimes too devoted for his tastes; he fears becoming a false idol, and takes great care to emphasize the hand of Bane guiding his actions. He travels constantly, but has established a small church in Aerie, in southern Nova Vaasa. The Church of Bane there is considerably more lax than in most of Nova Vaasa, and he has been given relatively free reign to preach his views as he wishes, though the church (known simply as The Reformed Church of Bane; Lukas does not go in for ostentation) has been subjected to intermittent acts of vandalism.

Personality

Most of the time, Father Lukas is soft-spoken and reserved, but he can become quite animated when sharing his vision of Bane with others. He sees Bane primarily as a god of law and order, and thus he generally has no tolerance for those who would disrupt the peace. He

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finds it ironic that in spreading his message of the true Bane, he has been characterized as a rebel and dissident.

Father Lukas believes strongly in the value of hard work and responsibility, so much that he can seem stern or harsh in his sermons. He cannot tolerate laziness or a lack of drive in others, any anyone who displays theses qualities around him will receive a long lecture.

Combat

Lukas abhors violence. He will not fight even to save his own life, trusting Bane to protect him. It would take a serious threat to the lives of others to force Lukas to raise his hands in violence, and he will always try talking or beseeching the intervention of Bane (in the form of clerical magic) first. He never carries a weapon or wears any armor.

Lukas has major access to the all, healing, necromantic, sun and wards spheres. He has minor access to the spheres of numbers and protection.

Using Father Lukas

Father Lukas is a strong believer in helping others; he feels cooperation is the basis of an orderly society. Anyone seeking refuge or sanctuary can count on Father Lukas to provide it. Of course, they'll have to work for it: maintaining and repairing the church, helping parishioners with their farms, and so forth. Also, Father Lukas will try his best to convert any unbelievers under his care, so adventurers seeking his aid had best be prepared for many lengthy sermons.

HOBERT MANNON

Appearance

Hobert Mannon stands 6'4" with a muscular build. He has curly red-brown hair and a thick beard and mustache. He wears a dirt brown tunic and breeches, and black walking boots. He also wears a long gray cloak for when the weather gets cold.

Hobert Mannon

8th-Level Human Ranger, Chaotic Good

Armor Class	7 (leather armor)	Str	16
Movement	12	Dex	15
Level/Hit Dice	8	Con	16
Hit Points	54	Int	11
THAC0	13	Wis	14
Morale	16	Cha	13

No. of Attacks	3/2
Damage/Attack	By weapon
Special Attacks	Nil
Special Defenses	Nil
Magic Resistance	Nil

Background

"Come in." The raunie's aged voice called softly from behind the curtain covering the entrance to her battered vardo.

Hobert Mannon pulled aside the blue curtain and stepped tentatively inside, a sheepish, self-conscious grin on his face. He had never had any truck with the Vistani before this day, and he wasn't at all sure what to expect; he was also somewhat embarrassed by the triviality of his visit.

The vardo was poorly lit, with only a handful of candles within, and the heavy curtain kept out most of the sunlight. The raunie sat at a table at the end of the vardo, mostly obscured by shadow.

"Show me your coin," she rasped.

Hobert frowned; it had cost him several coins simply to be allowed access to the camp, and quite a few more to be allowed to enter the vardo. Apparently a reading was yet another charge. Hobert reached into his leather coin purse and dropped a few silver onto the table.

The raunie looked at the coins in front of her, and wheezed a small noise of acquiescence. She gestured for Hobert to take the seat across from her.

As Hobert sat, the raunie, Madame Katrina, silently appraised him. He seemed large, clumsy, and simple, just like most of the peasants eking out a life along the Musarde here in Verbrek.

"You have come for a reading, yes?"

Hobert nodded, that sheepish grin still tugging the corners of his mouth. "The Vistani don't often seem to stop here in Verbrek for very long, and since you were here, and I was here, I thought I'd get my fortune told. I always wanted to do that . . ." His voice trailed off bashfully.

Madame Katrina sighed and nodded. She picked up her deck of Tarokka cards and started shuffling them, and winced at the pain such a simple motion caused her aged hands. It was customary to allow the one the reading was for to shuffle the cards, but she honestly did not want the lout to handle her beautifully crafted deck. Regardless, the cards would tell her what she wanted to know; they always had.

When the cards felt right to her, she laid out five from the top, in a line, face down. This was the simplest formation for Tarokka readings, and in this case, she thought as she looked at the man seated across from her, simple seemed best.

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“These five cards,” she said as she waved her hand across the table, “contain everything about you that there is to know.” That wasn’t strictly true, of course, but she doubted there was much to this fellow beyond what these five cards would tell her. “Your past, your present, your future, your hopes and dreams, and your very nature, your true self. Everything you are, in these five cards.” Hobert’s eyes grew wide and his smile grew larger and even more sheepish.

“The first card represents your past.” She reached out and turned the card over, revealing The Six of Coins, The Beggar. No surprise there. She tapped the card gently with her finger and closed her eyes, allowing the meaning of the card to fill her mind. “You come from humble beginnings. You were poor, a peasant, but you were not content with your lot.”

Hobert nodded, his eyes as large and round as a vardo’s wheels. “That’s true, ma’am. I was born here in Verbrek, near thirty years ago. I think it was called Arkandale back then. I lived in a village called Sable. Life was hard, but not so bad; still, I wanted to travel, to be something more.”

Madame Katrina sighed once more. Some people had no respect for the magic and mystery of a Tarokka reading, and insisted on talking throughout.

“The second card reveals your present, your life as it is now.” She flipped the card, revealing the Four of Glyphs, The Shepherd. This was something of a surprise. She tapped the card and closed her eyes. “You are a guide, a warden. You aid the hapless traveler to his destination.”

Hobert nodded again. “That’s true as well. I hire meself out as a guide to those who need one, and there are many who do. Most folks are afraid to travel the roads in this land, not to mention the wilderness. Even in the more civilized lands to the north, people don’t like to travel without protection. Me, I’ve never been afraid to wander. Once, as a young lad, some of me friends dared me to spend the night in the woods where the werebeasts live.” Madame Katrina nodded; the Vistani were all too aware of the creatures that called Verbrek home. “No one in the village, or any of the nearby villages, I reckon, wanted to brave the forests, but I was headstrong, and never refused a dare. I slept deep in the woods that night, and returned the next morning. Me friends were surprised to see me alive; they treated me like I was some kind of hero. Ever since then, I’ve been partial to the forests, and to travelin’.”

Madame Katrina listened to this with some surprise. She’d never heard of a lone traveler escaping the notice of Timothy’s packs before. They prided themselves on their . . . *thoroughness*.

“The third card reveals your hopes and dreams, what you wish to be.” She flipped the card, revealing the Two of Coins, The Philanthropist. Now this was unusual. She

tapped the card and closed her eyes. “It is your fondest desire to help your fellow man. Helping others gives you deep satisfaction. You are selfless and compassionate.”

Hobert blushed deeply. “Well, I can’t be no judge on the truth of that. Wouldn’t be proper. I do like to help others, though. That’s part of why I wanted to be a guide. There’s not much money in it, but I’ve got all I need to live.”

Madame Katrina found herself suddenly starting to take a liking to this lout in front of her. She smiled slightly, and reached for the fourth card.

“This card reveals your future, that which you shall be.” She paused before she turned the card. “Understand, the future is not written. In this regard, the cards reveal only possibilities, nothing more.” Hobert nodded slowly, and she wasn’t completely convinced that he really did understand, but nevertheless she flipped the card.

The Two of Swords looked up at her. The Paladin. She tapped the card and closed her eyes. “You shall become a warrior for the good. You shall fight to defend the weak against the strong. You shall become a hero, loved and respected by the people.”

Hobert laughed. Madame Katrina looked at him sharply. He stopped laughing, but could not erase the grin from his face. “I’m sorry ma’am, but that just doesn’t seem too likely. I’ve been in plenty of fights before, mostly against goblins and such. They like to attack travelers, figure ‘em for easy pickin’s. But a hero? Even if I could be one, I’m not sure I’d want it. I’m happy as a guide.”

Madame Katrina regarded him. “Our destinies choose us more often than we choose them.” She reached for the fifth, and final card. “This last card reveals your inner nature, your true self, that which may be hidden even to you.” She flipped the card over slowly. It was The Artifact.

She leaned back slowly in her chair. She’d never seen The Artifact as the fifth card. It was very often the third card, where it showed that a person’s hopes and dreams focused on a material object. But the fifth card? She had no idea what that could mean. With some trepidation, she reached out and tapped the card, her eyes closed. This reading was turning out to be quite. . .

“Unique.” She whispered as the meaning of the card came to her. “You are unique. You are . . . *gifted*. You have a talent, a quality such as is possessed by no other man.” She continued to tap the card. There was more to be told, something this card could not reveal. She picked up her tarokka deck and turned the top card, placing it below The Artifact. It was The Innocent.

She tapped the card, and closed her eyes. Suddenly, she knew the nature of his gift. She knew why he had been able to spend a night in the forests of Verbrek

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unmolested. She knew that he could do it again, and again, anytime he wished.

“What is my gift?” Hobert was growing anxious, eager. “Does the card say?”

Madame Katrina opened her eyes and looked at him. She shook her head. “No. I am sorry. I hoped that a sixth card might reveal more, but the cards refuse to tell me anymore on this matter.” She looked at the silver on the table. “You may keep your coin.”

Hobert smiled, and shook his head. “Fair payment for services rendered. This was very interestin’. Thank you, ma’am.” He stood up.

“You are welcome. Travel safely,” she said, smiling to herself as she watched him leave. Indeed, he would travel safely. That was his gift, after all.

She would have to send word out. The Vistani would keep an eye on this one. He could prove incredibly useful in the future . . .

Current Sketch

Hobert continues to serve as a hired guide and protector to travelers. He tends to stay in the southern Core, because it is there that guides are most needed. He likes to return to his home village in Verbrek every few months; his family (both parents, an older sister and a younger brother) still live there, and he provides them with most of the money he makes as a guide. He himself has no permanent residence; he generally prefers to make camp outdoors.

Personality

Hobert is one of the most humble, selfless people one could have the pleasure of meeting in Ravenloft. Though he honestly thinks of himself has nothing special, he is generous and kind to a degree that the more cynical or paranoid find almost suspicious. He never hesitates to offer his aid to any who find themselves in need.

Hobert is genuinely happy with his lot in life. He loves the forests of the Core and he finds great joy in simply traveling. His only dissatisfaction is that the world seems not quite large enough to suit his tastes.

Though he lacks sophistication in his speech and mannerisms, he is not crude by any stretch of the imagination, and behaves with a rural gentility that can be quite charming. He would like to settle down and have a family some time in the future, but unfortunately he tends to get tongue-tied around women. He also blushes easily, to his never-ending embarrassment.

Combat

Hobert has the combat abilities of a 7th-level ranger. His usual weapon is a stout oak club that doubles as a walking

stick. He also carries a long bow. He wears leather armor when he wears any at all.

Hobert can Hide in Shadows at 43% and Move Silently at 55%. These abilities are halved in non-wilderness environments.

Hobert’s Gift of Innocence, as discovered by Madame Katrina, is incredibly powerful. Its nature is a mystery, but it protects him in his travels. Hobert is completely undetectable to most creatures of the night. To the undead and to lycanthropes in hybrid or beast form, Hobert is invisible and inaudible, and cannot be detected by them by smell or by magical means. This protection is canceled only if Hobert attacks, and even then he becomes detectable only by the creature attacked, and not any companions it might have.

Using Hobert

If the characters are in need of a guide, Hobert is an excellent choice. He is very familiar with the woodlands of the Core, particularly the southern domains. He’s also an excellent tracker if the characters find themselves in need of one. He is also good in a fight if it comes to that.

Hobert appears to have a destiny that has yet to be realized. The Tarokka reading and his unusual gift both point to this. The true nature behind his gift has intentionally been left a mystery. Perhaps Hobert is the fulfillment of an ancient Vistani prophecy, or perhaps the gift has been given to him by the opponents of the dark powers theorized in Lord of the Necropolis. Perhaps it is a legacy of some heroic ancestor, or perhaps a mere accident of birth. Regardless, Hobert has the potential to be one of the Core’s great heroes; will he realize it?

THE HON. JAMES MARTIGAN

Appearance

James Martigan looks as if the weight of the demiplane is perched squarely on his shoulders. He looks every day of his 72 years. He has gotten very thin and frail over the past decade, and his health is deteriorating rapidly with age; he now requires a cane to walk and rise, and he is prone to fits of coughing. His face is etched with deep wrinkles and his eyes have little life left in them. His only remaining youthful feature is his hair, which has only just started to thin and remains a strong steel gray. He has a short gray beard, but no mustache.

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James Martigan

0-Level Human, Lawful Good

Armor Class	10	Str	10
Movement	12	Dex	10
Level/Hit Dice	1	Con	11
Hit Points	4	Int	14
THACO	20	Wis	13
Morale	11	Cha	14
No. of Attacks	1		
Damage/Attack	1d2		
Special Attacks	Nil		
Special Defenses	Nil		
Magic Resistance	Nil		

Background

Once again, James Martigan woke up screaming his daughter's name.

He sat upright, sweat dripping from his face and sinking into his beard, his eyes still closed. Twelve years. It had been twelve years since she had been taken, and still he could not escape the nightmares.

He had had every reason to believe that everything was going to turn out well. Ever since Megan, his wife and Sara's mother, had died of the consumption while Sara was just a child, life had been so difficult for the both of them. He had always felt like he was going through the motions of being a parent; he had had no idea how to raise a daughter on his own. He was one of the richest men in Mordentshire, a brilliant merchant and trader, and he had felt utterly lost.

Somehow, they had both survived her childhood, and Sara had become a beautiful young woman. When young Daniel Sherwood had nervously approached him asking for his permission to court her, he had been both sad and overjoyed. His little girl had grown up.

Sara and Daniel were very happy together, and very much in love . . . until one evening, Daniel fell from his horse, striking his head on the cobblestones. He never woke up, and Sara was heartbroken.

A fortnight after Daniel's death, James began noticing some disturbing changes in Sara. She began speaking of Daniel as if he were still alive. Her eyes would glaze over when talking about him, and her tone would become wistful and quiet. This was a far cry from the intelligent, excitable young woman he knew his daughter to be, but he assumed it was merely a phase of her mourning, and so he said nothing.

Sara's behavior soon grew more disturbing. She spoke of Daniel visiting her in the night. She began to grow pale and listless, often refusing to even leave her room. The few times she did leave the house, it was only to visit the cemetery. Her weakness grew more and more pronounced with each passing day. Truly concerned

about his daughter's health, James finally decided to send for a doctor. Not just any doctor, but the best in Mordent, and a friend as well: Dr. Rudolph van Richten. Eager to help a friend in any way he could, Van Richten visited the Martigan home late that evening—the most horrible evening of James Martigan's life. Memories flooded back with a life of their own . . .

Van Richten listened with rapt attention to the symptoms described by James, and concern flooded his features.

"It is entirely possible that the behavior you are describing is simply a result of the tragedy she had experienced . . . but I have known Sara for years. She is not the kind of woman to give up on life so easily. Tell me . . . how long have you had these concerns?"

James thought a moment. "About ten days. Perhaps as many as twelve."

"Then we had best hurry to her bedchamber . . . and pray that I am wrong, for I fear I know the cause of her ill health."

The two men hastened up the stairs to Sara's chamber door. James knocked softly. "Sara?" No response came from within. He knocked again, much louder this time. "Sara!"

Van Richten reached for the doorknob. It was locked. James reached into his pocket, drawing forth a key. He tried it in the knob . . . and found that it would not fit. Frowning, he looked at the key, verified that it was the right one, and tried it again. It still did not fit.

James felt a sudden, irrational fear grow in his chest. He began pounding the door roughly with both hands, screaming his daughter's name.

"James . . . is there an ax in the house?" Van Richten's voice was thick with urgency.

"Yes . . . yes. I'll get it." James hurried away.

Van Richten stood back from the door, calling out to Sara. A knot of apprehension formed in his stomach. If this was what he feared it was, they were taking far too long.

James returned, ax in hand, and before Van Richten could say a word he ran at the door, swinging the ax wildly. The blade bit into the wood once, then twice. James brought it back for a third swing, heedless of Van Richten's shouts of warning. He swung the ax forward . . .

And the door caught it. The door *caught* the ax. The wood of the door warped and flexed, a gnarled hand reaching out from it. The hand caught the ax blade firmly as the metal bit into it. James screamed and tugged wildly, but the hand would not release it.

"Ye gods . . . it's here! The Phantom Lover is here! We must hurry!" Van Richten ran forward, placing his hands on the ax haft and aiding James in his tugs. Between the two of them, they managed to roughly pull the ax blade free. Van Richten grabbed the ax blade from

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James, and brought it down with all his might on the chamber's door knob. The knob broke off, and the door swung open. The two men rushed into the room . . .

The Phantom stood by the bed, Sara limp in his embrace, her arms locked longingly around his neck with what little strength they had left. "You are too late," he whispered as he and Sara faded into shadow. "Love can not long be denied . . ." His sinuous voice trailed off into nothingness as he and Sara vanished.

James fell to his knees, screaming his daughter's name. Van Richten grabbed him and shook him, yelling to get his attention. "The cemetery, James! We must hurry to the cemetery! We can still save her!"

Van Richten's optimism proved unfounded. They ran to the cemetery, only to find one of Sara's slippers on the ground, next to Daniel Sherwood's grave. Sara was gone, forever.

James and Rudolph had drifted apart after that. Though he knew it was irrational, part of him could not help but blame Van Richten for not being able to save his daughter . . . just as he blamed himself.

However, James had vowed to himself that day that others would be saved. Though he was old and weak, there were plenty of the young and strong out there, men and women with their own reasons for combating the supernatural. Since his daughter's death, James Martigan has been an ally and patron to dozens of young monster hunters and ghostwatchers. It is his hope that someday a hero will come forth who can destroy the wicked spirit that preyed upon his daughter's suffering and eventually took her life.

Then maybe the nightmares will finally end.

Current Sketch

James Martigan, one of the wealthiest members of Mordentshire's gentry, has devoted his considerable resources toward aiding those who are willing and able to combat the supernatural. His ultimate goal is the destruction of the creature known as the Phantom Lover (and, perhaps, the rescue of his daughter's soul thereby), but in the meantime every blow struck against the darkness eases a little bit of his pain.

Any young person who approaches him with an earnest desire to become a monster hunter and a request for aid will receive it. He will provide equipment, expenses, transportation; whatever they reasonably need. He is still a shrewd businessman, and can smell a charlatan a mile away; additionally, he has turned away a fair number of sincere youths who in his opinion were simply lacking. He has no wish to have the deaths of the foolish or incompetent on his conscience. At the moment, he is acting as patron for a half-dozen individual adventurers, and he is constantly on the lookout for more.

Personality

James Martigan has made his quest against the supernatural his sole ambition. In some way, he feels that aiding others in combating evil grants him a measure of redemption for failing to save his daughter's life. It is only in hearing about the latest victories of his protégées that he feels any degree of excitement or energy.

Unfortunately, that excitement is often more than offset by the guilt and sorrow he feels when news of one of his adventurers' deaths reaches him. He had paid for the funerals of seven young men and women over the last decade, and he still makes every effort to visit their graves when he can.

Combat

James Martigan is completely unsuited to combat. If faced with an aggressor, he will resign himself to whatever fate they have in mind; he has neither the strength nor the will to fight.

Using James Martigan

James Martigan can serve as a patron for a young group of monster hunters, serving as a source of equipment and information for low-level characters who otherwise might be unable to find them. In return he expects only competency; it takes only a success or two to earn his complete trust and enthusiasm, after which they will find him even more generous than before.

Martigan can also put the characters in touch with other young adventurers he is currently aiding, or more experienced ones he had aided in the past, should they find themselves in need of assistance in combating some great threat. His elaborate network of monster hunter contacts also provides him with excellent information regarding likely sites of hauntings or other supernatural depredations. Overall, he is one of the best friends a monster hunter could have.

MADELINE GALBRAITH

Appearance

Madeline Galbraith is an attractive but not quite beautiful woman in her early thirties. Her mahogany brown hair is already showing some signs of graying, and she has developed some wrinkles around her eyes and the corners of her mouth, but these signs of early aging do not detract much from her appearance. Because she travels so often, she generally

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wears whatever she finds most comfortable for the journey at hand.

Madeline Galbraith

Human Dual-Class 1st-Level Arcanist/2nd-Level Thief (Ghostwatcher), Neutral Good

Armor Class	9	Str	12
Movement	12	Dex	15
Level/Hit Dice	2	Con	10
Hit Points	10	Int	17
THAC0	20	Wis	15
Morale	16	Cha	13
No. of Attacks	1		
Damage/Attack	1d4 or by weapon		
Special Attacks	Backstab		
Special Defenses	Nil		
Magic Resistance	Nil		
Thief's Skills	PP 15% OL 20% FRT 50% MS 20% HS 15% DN 15% CW 60% RL 15%.		

Background

As far back as she can remember, Madeline Galbraith has not been like other girls. Normal girls don't see the ghosts of the departed every time they turn their head. She can't remember the first time she saw a ghost, or even a time when seeing ghosts struck her as strange or frightening. They've always simply been there, a part of her life as she grew up in Mordentshire.

The ghosts had almost never bothered her, and those few that did, feeling some long-dead spark of hope reignite upon realizing that they could be seen, soon gave up in frustration when they realized that they had no way to communicate. Madeline could not hear the words of the dead, though they seemed to understand her well enough. Since they had nothing to gain from her, and she nothing to gain from them, she and the ghosts largely left each other alone.

That is not to say, of course, that the ghosts had no effect on Madeline's life; quite the contrary. Madeline found the ghosts fascinating, especially the ones who dressed in strange, old clothing that no one in Mordent wore anymore. These, she deduced, had died in Mordent's distant past, and that thought intrigued her. It was like looking at moving pages of history, and whenever she saw such a ghost she regretted not being able to communicate with them.

Despite the disappointment of not being able to communicate with the ghosts that interested her so, Madeline's fascination with history stayed strong. Unfortunately, as a child attending school, history never seemed to be a subject the teachers considered worth stressing. Even the history of Mordent itself seemed to be

considered of little value . . . and asking a question about the history of any of the nearby lands generally received no answer other than a baffled stare.

When she moved on to the famous Academe de Richemulot, she hoped things would be different, but they weren't by any significant amount; in fact, in some ways they were much worse. The people of Richemulot seemed to be almost contemptuous of the past, and the records of the "historians" were always vague and often contradictory once one moved past the last 50 or 60 years. Madeline's struggles with this ignorance and apathy made her look all the more longingly at the ghosts of the past . . . and finally drove her to seek a solution.

Dropping out of the Academe before it could do any more damage, Madeline turned to the libraries, antiquarians and arcaneries, hoping to find some means to communicate with the dead. She dabbled in the study of magic for a time, but gave up in frustration; communication with the dead seemed to be the province of the priest, not the mage. She then focused her efforts solely on antiquarians and occult shops, holding to find some arcane trinket that would enable her to speak with the ghosts. Eventually, her search bore fruit.

In a small occult shop in Chateaufaux, Madeline traded the remainder of the money that was supposed to have gone to her tuition for a small medallion that the owner swore would enable her to speak with ghosts, provided she knew the language they spoke in life. The owner also gave her a steel dagger with a silver handle, insisting that it was only a matter of time before she would need it.

Aided by the medallion, Madeline began discretely interviewing a portion of the ghosts she encountered, searching for every possible detail of the past she could find, helping the ghosts find rest as best she could in return. With the knowledge the ghosts have given her, Madeline has actually been able to construct coherent histories of Dementlieu, Mordent and Lamordia, and had her findings published. Though there are still gaps to be filled, Madeline's histories have become quite popular, and she has become quite esteemed as a scholar. Of course, no one knows the secret behind her success.

Current Sketch

Before Madeline, history and archaeology were the poorest cousins of scientific study in the Core. The disparate and mysterious origins of many of the domains made historical inquiry seem an impossible task. Madeline has done a great deal to change that perception with her clear and specific historical records, though the fact that no one else has been able to duplicate her success keeps history from catching up fully with the other fields of learning.

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Madeline has turned the thrust of her inquiries toward archaeology, for the simple fact that old and abandoned ruins often have the oldest and most intriguing ghosts. Astonishingly, Madeline has been able to find evidences of long dead cultures in domains such as Necropolis, Lamordia and even in Mordent. On a few rare occasions, she has seen ghosts with appearances and styles of dress that are completely foreign to anything known to have existed in the Core. So far, these ghosts have avoided her, but she continues to seek them out. Their presence is the most intriguing mystery she has yet encountered.

With the aid of Vistani caravans, Madeline has traveled all over the Core and even beyond, into domains such as Har' Akir and Sri Raji. Treks such as these are dangerous, and she is always searching for strong and brave men willing to come along for a fee. She has made enough money from her books that she need not worry overly much about the costs of these trips, and what she does spend is usually returned to her several times when the resulting book is published. When a journey is finished, she returns to her adopted home of Port-a-Lucine.

Personality

The pursuit of knowledge is the one driving passion in Madeline's life. She has little inclination and even less time to think about such things as starting a family. When she is in the field, she is strictly business, and when she's not, she is still, for the most part, strictly business. Strangely, it is only when dealing with ghosts that she seems to show sentimentality or emotion. She will do most anything in her power to help a restless ghost find peace, even if it can't repay her with historical information.

Her ability to see ghosts is her prized secret. She let's no one know of it, and never speaks to ghosts when there are others in earshot.

Combat

Madeline is no fighter, but that doesn't mean she'll quail before any fool with a sword in his hands. She has lived with the faces of the dead and damned since she was a child; it takes a lot to rattle her. When it comes to combat, Madeline fights with the dagger given to her by the occult shop owner. Though she doesn't know it, the dagger is a magical *dagger +1, +3 vs. ethereal*.

Madeline's other magical item is the medallion of ghost-speech, her most prized possession. While worn, the medallion enable the wearer to speak with ghosts as if a *speak with dead* spell had been cast. As with the spell, the wearer must know the language spoken by the ghost in life.

Madeline studied magic for a time and knows a few spells. Her spell-book contains the following first-level spells: *comprehend languages, detect magic, read magic*. She does not actively seek out new spells; sometimes she neglects to even carry her spell-book with her.

Using Madeline

There may be no greater authority on the histories of the various domains of the Core than Madeline, save perhaps the lords of those respective domains. If the characters need any historical question answered, she is the first person to whom they should turn. How much of her knowledge is "real" and how much is fiction created by the Mists cannot be known for certain, but in the long run it may not matter. False history is still history as far as the people of Ravenloft are concerned.

Madeline is even more valuable as a ghostwatcher, if, that is, they can uncover her secret. The signs are there if one looks closely; Madeline manages to gather a surprising amount of information from surprisingly few sources.

Madeline can also serve as an employer for the player characters, and thus an excellent excuse to get them to travel to a distant domain.

Don't forget about the mysterious, foreign ghosts Madeline sees from time to time, or the occult shopkeeper's promise that she would need the dagger he gave her . . . perhaps Madeline's precious medallion carries with it unforeseen consequences . . .

MAREK CRAWFORD

Appearance

Marek is a dark, brooding man with a depressed air about him. He is quiet and private, and very uncomfortable in most social situations. He is a tall man with broad shoulders and a powerful build, and he walks as if he were in constant fear of damaging his surroundings. His hair is an inky black, and is unkempt and somewhat over grown. His eyes are colored a dull, washed blue that looks almost gray.

Marek Crawford

11th-Level Human Fighter (Witch Hunter),

Lawful Good

Armor Class	10	Str	17
Movement	12	Dex	14
Level/Hit Dice	11	Con	15
Hit Points	57	Int	14
THAC0	10	Wis	17
Morale	15	Cha	13

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No. of Attacks	3/2
Damage/Attack	By weapon
Special Attacks	None
Special Defenses	+2 to saves vs. magic (see below)
Magic Resistance	Nil

Background

Marek Crawford kneeled before the statue of Ezra in the Great Cathedral, fingers laced together and eyes downcast. He had most of the great hall to himself; there were few worshippers this late in the evening. Even in a cathedral, under Ezra's watchful gaze, few felt safe when the sun descended. Marek felt disgust at the lack of faith of the masses rising within him, but quickly swallowed it and murmured a prayer of contrition, one more among many.

He knew Ezra had long ago forgiven him for the sins of his past, but he had not yet forgiven himself, and so he felt compelled to ask her mercy anew each week. He wondered if she found that insulting . . .

If so, one more thing to seek forgiveness for.

He had once thought himself a soldier of righteousness, a champion standing against the darkness. He had taken up his sword against the wicked, striking down those who would harm the innocent. The people had called him a hero, praised him for seeking out and destroying those who would seek to use evil magics against them.

Magic. Even now, the word sent chills up and down his spine. Though he tried and tried again to let it go, to release the hatred that had consumed his life, he still felt his hackles rise at the thought of mages. It was a mage who had killed his parents when he was but a child, and stolen his life from him.

Hazlik. He felt the back of his neck grow hot, felt his teeth clench.

Hazlik had killed his parents, and he still didn't know why.

It had been 721. He was eight years old. He and his parents lived in a small house in Toyalis. They were of the Rashemi people, the lower class of Hazlan, and life there was hard, but they had been happy. Happy, until Hazlik's enforcers took his parents away, to the tables, leaving him behind to die an orphan.

He assumed his parents had been accused of treason for some reason. Why, he could not say. As likely as not, they had done nothing at all, but often an accusation was all that was necessary for an execution . . . or worse, as in the case of his parents, for experimentation.

It was his hatred that kept him alive during those years alone, he knew. His hatred of Hazlik, and of the wealthy Mulan people to whom Hazlik belonged, kept him alive when food was scarce and the weather grew cold. It had made him strong. Eventually, he grew strong

enough and hateful enough that mere survival was no longer enough. He needed to act. He could not take his revenge against Hazlik, not yet, so in 728 he left Hazlan altogether, and traveled north to Darkon. At that time, Hazlik still forbade the use of magic in his domain, so Darkon had been the center of magical study in the Land of the Mists, and Marek had intended to learn everything about mages that he possibly could.

In 731, Marek killed his first wizard, a Tepestani necromancer who had been raiding the small graveyards of Kellee. It was the beginning of an illustrious career. Over the next two decades he would kill dozens of evil mages, sometimes alone, sometimes in the company of other famous hunters of evil. Dr. Rudolph van Richten, George Weathermay, Ivan Dragonov . . . he had worked with them and many others in hunting down the evil and arcane.

He would likely have continued on in his vengeful wrath forever, blind to the evil of his hatred, had he not met a true champion against the darkness. Nearly two years ago, he had met Tara Kolyana.

She was a few years older than he, but she had looked so young and fragile, especially beside him. Just looking at her had let him see for the first time how his hatred and anger had aged him. Together, they had managed to find and capture a mage who had been bedeviling the people of a small Invidian hamlet. He would have killed the wretch, but she had not allowed him to.

Under her guidance, that wretch was now a devout follower of Ezra, a redeemed man. She had healed a life, where he had done nothing but take them. Seeing the power of her faith in action, feeling the shame of his own sin, he had turned to Ezra himself, hanging up his sword. His faith still fit him poorly, and he was not yet comfortable in it, but he had vowed to himself that he would not fail in this as he had at so many other things before.

Sighing, he began his prayers anew.

Current Sketch

Marek was once one of Ravenloft's foremost warriors against the creatures of darkness, particularly when it came to fighting evil mages and arcanists. He was also a man consumed by his own hatred, wallowing in his own rage and tortured by his own past. Now, guided by the example of Tara Kolyana, he has turned to the Church and abandoned his old career.

At the request of Tara, the priests of the Great Cathedral in Levkarest took Marek in. In return for food and lodging, Marek attends to whatever chores or labors the priests request of him. Most of the rest of his time is taken up in prayer or in confession.

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Personality

Marek is caught in a struggle within himself, an internal battle over the fate of his soul. He believes his life of blood and battle has set him on the path to damnation, and he is now trying to reverse that fate. He understands academically that Ezra is a forgiving and merciful goddess, but somehow he cannot accept that on an emotional level and thus feels a constant need to redeem himself again and again in her eyes.

His feelings toward Tara Kolyana run parallel to his feelings toward Ezra. He loves her deeply, something he has not fully come to realize, but fears that she must see him as a butcher and a monster despite every indication to the contrary.

Marek's feelings of shame result in him being withdrawn and sullen much of the time, though occasionally a fire can be seen flickering in his eyes briefly before dying down again. He throws these remaining passions into his chores and duties at the Cathedral, which he takes very seriously . . . even more seriously than the priests themselves, it sometimes seems.

Combat

Marek now tries his best to avoid violence, but a warrior's rage still runs through his blood, and a threat to the Cathedral, the anchorites, or especially Tara Kolyana could enrage him enough to lead him to take up a blade once more. Should he do so, he fights as an 11th-level fighter, with the following additions.

Marek is a Witch Hunter, a specialized variant on the Monster Hunter kit presented in *Champions of the Mists*. Essentially, Marek is a Monster Hunter with evil mages as his "monster" of choice. Marek gets a +2 bonus on any proficiency or ability check that deals with tracking down and combating evil mages. However, unlike Monster Hunters, Marek does not receive a +2 bonus on all damage rolls vs. his chosen enemy; rather, he receives a +2 bonus on all saving throws vs. spells cast by an evil mage. Marek's very hatred and anger toward evil wizards fortifies his attempts to resist their magic.

Marek also suffers the special hindrances of the Monster Hunter class; his reputation is such that evil mages are often prepared to fight him, and they receive a +2 bonus to initiative in combat against him. While hunting, Marek must also maintain a "moderate" level of encumbrance and no less, as he carries copious amounts of specialized equipment (the details are left to the Dungeon Master; his arsenal varies depending on his foe).

However, at the present Marek has essentially forsaken his kit, and has lost the special abilities it would normally grant him. While the experience and desire for vengeance that fuel those special benefits still exist within Marek, he has done his best to suppress them and has

allowed them to fall by the wayside. Thus, until he spends time retraining and regaining his edge, Marek cannot use the special benefits of his kit. He also does not have to carry his witch hunting equipment, but his reputation as a witch hunter is still strong, and evil mages still receive a +2 bonus to initiative in combat against him.

Using Marek

Marek could be a powerful ally in any fight, particularly against an evil wizard, but it would take dire circumstances to lead him to turn to adventuring once more, and his guilt and self-recrimination afterward would be truly epic. Still, an adventure involving Hazlik as a villain, or a situation that puts Tara Kolyana in some kind of danger, could be enough to pull him out of "retirement".

Marek also has a small degree of influence within the Ezran church; at the very least, he could likely convince the anchorites of the Great Cathedral to provide sanctuary for a time.

ORINDA NAHLE

Appearance



Orinda is old, approaching her 85th year, but one does not have to look very long to see the ghost of her youthful beauty. Her silver hair is tied back in a loose ponytail, with wisps of hair falling forward to hang by her temples. Her eyes are soft and blue, and her smile is warm; her features give her an aura of kindness and gentleness that has led many to dismiss her as a little old lady and nothing more. This is a serious mistake. Orinda has seen much in her many years, and she quails before nothing. When called upon to exercise her authority, she has a voice of steel and the bearing of one who expects to be obeyed.

She remains in surprisingly good health despite her advancing age; her main concession to the years is her left leg, which is lame and arthritic from an injury in her younger days. She requires the use of a cane to walk.

Orinda Nahle

9th-Level Human Bard, Lawful Good

Armor Class	10	Str	7
Movement	6	Dex	10
Level/Hit Dice	9	Con	9
Hit Points	19	Int	16
THAC0	18	Wis	15
Morale	16	Cha	17
No. of Attacks	1		

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Damage/Attack	1d2 or by weapon
Special Attacks	Spells
Special Defenses	Spells
Magic Resistance	Nil

Notes: Orinda's statistics have been adjusted to reflect her age, and are thus far lower than one would expect for a 9th level character.

Background

Dr. Rudolph van Richten was easily the most famous and most successful monster hunter to grace the Land of Mists, but he is far from the first. Stretching back through the generations, men and women, both young and old, have risked their lives in the effort to stem the tide of darkness. Orinda Nahle is one such woman, the last relic of a generation of heroes since passed.

Orinda Nahle (née Roys) was born in 669 in Kartakass, in the village of Skald. Her father and mother jointly ran the town's most popular and prosperous tavern, the Tippling Minstrel, and as a growing girl Orinda learned a great deal about the "art of serving", as her father called it. Though it wasn't a hard life as such things go, it wasn't a particularly fun one. Most of her youth was spent serving drinks, cooking meals and cleaning up at night. She never received any formal schooling, instead being taught to read and write by her mother, and never really knew any children her age. Her one true pleasure as a girl was singing. Orinda was blessed with an angelic voice, even by Kartakan standards, and an excellent ear for music. It did not take long for her father to recognize her talent, and by the age of eight Orinda found herself singing on a near-nightly basis for the Minstrel's customers. Although young, she found singing before the crowds to be more thrilling and gratifying than anything she had ever known.

Orinda was forced to content herself with that intermittent joy for the next eight years. Despite her beauty and appealing innocence, no one ever sought her out for courting; the local boys were far too mindful of her thickset father's disapproving glowering to risk life and limb in pursuit of her. With no outside prospects apparent, Orinda finally resigned herself to the life of a barmaid . . . only to see her life forever changed that same year, when they came into the tavern.

They weren't all that much older than Orinda, but they had seen so much more than her in their lives that those each of those extra eight or ten years might as well have been decades. The five of them sat at one of the tavern's more private tables, for all the good it did them; every eye in the house was fixed squarely on them, some struck with awe, some narrowed with distrust, most simply wide with disbelief. Five of the most famous and infamous adventurers of the Core seated at a table in a small Kartakan town.

The informal leader of the informal party, Loran Elbrian, pretended not to notice the eyes of the room as he chatted nonchalantly with his companions. According to the tales, he had been brought to this land from another world, stolen by the Mists. In that other world, he had been a knight of highest standing and noblest blood, but here he was renowned for his humility and his insistence that "in this world apart, he was as any other man." It was said that he was beloved of the gods; his touch, it was said, could heal the gravest wounds, and the creatures of the night were said to flee from his countenance.

To his right, Talaq al-Hirash sat stonily, his arms crossed and his eyes narrowed; many of the tavern's patrons turned away when his gaze fell upon them. The stoic warrior from the distant land of Phrazzia was known for his preference for privacy. Little else about him was known, save that his twin scimitars were made of purest silver and had been the death of many an monstrous abomination.

Beside him sat Tobias Stark, his hair, clothing and demeanor all black as the midnight sky. He was often known as the Joyless, for he was never seen to laugh or even to smile. It was rumored that the loss of a loved one, or several, had led him to take up arms against the night. He was the eldest of the group at thirty, and it was whispered that he was also the most dangerous. Stark's eyes were firmly on the tabletop before him.

Beoryth the Blood Hound, by contrast, was usually in high spirits, and that night was no different. It was said that Beoryth could track a crow through the nighttime Mists, but all he seemed interested in tracking that night was a little female company and a great deal of ale. He openly invited the stares of the crowd, meeting their stares with a wink and a grin, a grin that grew wider when a woman met his eyes.

Lastly sat Perryn Nahle, a handsome and dashing young man who, it was said, had fallen into the career of an adventurer by accident. He was a young musician who had met and befriended Beoryth in an inn one night, and somehow, through circumstances even he would have been hard pressed to explain, found himself accompanying the ranger on his monster hunts. Of the five, Perryn was the youngest, barely twenty, but he had quickly learned the ropes of his inadvertent career and was only marginally less famed than his fellows.

And Perryn's eyes were locked with hers.

Even as she served the various tables of the tavern, Orinda never turned her eyes from Perryn's for long, and always upon turning back she found him still watching her. Her father noticed the two staring before too long, but there was little even he could do to intimidate a man like Perryn . . . nor was he brave enough even to try.

When Orinda sang that night, she sang for the first time, not solely for herself, and not for a tavern full of guests, but to a single man. As she sang, Perryn's stare

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softened, its intensity replaced by something else, something even more inviting that she couldn't quite put a word to.

When the five rose and left that night, Orinda left with them, not saying a word of goodbye to her parents for fear that she might be forbidden to leave by her father, or talked out of leaving by her mother.

As she lay next to him that night, Perryn told her in low tones of the trials that were inherent in a life with him. She could stay at home in safety, as he went forth hunting monsters, and thereby lack for his company, or she could be always at his side and therefore always in danger of death or worse. Either would be a hard life, he warned. She must choose which she wanted, or if she wanted neither.

Intoxicated by his presence, enthralled by that night and enchanted by thoughts of a life of excitement, Orinda chose to stay at his side . . . and thus began the life of an adventurer. Perryn and Orinda were wed the very next day, his companions the only guests.

Orinda had much to learn, but fortunately her new friends proved willing and able teachers. Elbrian taught her everything he could about swordsmanship: how to hold a blade, how to swing it, and, most importantly, how to avoid being swung at in turn. After she learned the fundamentals, he taught her more and more sophisticated techniques: how to take advantage of terrain, how to anticipate her opponent's movements, and how to end a duel as quickly and efficiently as possible. He also aided her in physical conditioning, and under his tutelage she grew ever stronger and ever quicker. Throughout it all, he was patient and kind, willing to repeat a lesson as many times as was necessary for her to learn it and never seeming to grow frustrated.

Al-Hirash, she would quickly learn, was the sharpest of wit and quickest of thought in the group, and he trained her to exercise her mind and focus it on the object at hand. Everything was important, he stressed. Take notice of everything and take nothing for granted. There are many things in the world that cannot be beaten with steel, but there was nothing that couldn't be beaten by a sharp mind. Her sessions with Talaq left her as drained mentally as those with Elbrian left her physically, but she learned much under the Pharazian's tutelage, and found him a warmer and more jovial soul than she had expected. He became one of her closest friends.

Beoryth, never one to ignore a pretty face, taught her the basics of survival. He showed her which plants were safe to eat and which ones meant a quick death, how to find fresh water when none seemed at hand and how to find her way in even the thickest forest. He also showed her how to hunt for her food, especially how to follow an animal by its tracks.

Stark taught her much as well, though she didn't realize it at the time. The grim Mordentishman never

spoke to her save to say an unkind word, never gave her a look that wasn't tinged with venom. Her was relentless in his prodding and scorn, and she left his company in tears more than once. Over time, she found herself hardening to his presence, and when she finally turned on him and told him exactly where he could put his opinions, she could swear that she saw a smile hidden underneath his thick mustache, though it was gone in an instant. Never again did he speak to her unkindly, treating her as a grown woman and no longer as a child.

Perryn, for his part, shared with her the knowledge gained on countless travels. She had never set foot outside Skald before, and the world was wider than she had known. Perryn had an ear for languages and a head for customs and cultures, and he imparted to Orinda everything he could. He also shared with her stories and songs from across the Core, assuring her that there was much wisdom to be found in them.

It did not take long for Orinda to become a formidable monster hunter in her own right, and with her friends and husband at her side she stood against some of the most evil and frightening denizens of the Demiplane. Despite the dangers and horrors she encountered, she was never so happy as she was in those years. Unfortunately, they could not last forever.

Tobias Stark was the first of her fellows to die, lost to the world when Orinda was 27. He was torn to pieces by Claude Renier and his rodentine servants in the sewers of Richemulot, his mysterious quest for vengeance never resolved. Loran Elbrian fell only five years later at the hands of a marauding werewolf pack. They managed to drive the wolves away, but Loran was mauled beyond the power of faith to heal.

After Loran's death, they decided to go their separate ways. She never heard what became of al-Hirash; presumably he returned to his homeland, where hopefully he died an old man. Beoryth continued to gather fame as a slayer of beasts, until he was stabbed in a Dorvinian brothel in the year 720. Though officially it was written off as the sad ending of a drunken brawl, rumors that the famous warrior had been professionally assassinated continued for years.

She and Perryn continued hunting for a time after Loran's death as well. Their last adventure, if such a tragic event could be called that, would be a decade later, in the land of Gundarak. They had had many clashes with the vampire lord of that land in the past, all of them inconclusive, and in the year 711 the Duke determined to settle the score once and for all. Orinda and Perryn were abducted from Invidia, where they had been staying at the time, by several of Gundar's agents, and brought before the Duke himself.

Gundar, in one of his rare jovial moods, decided to play a little game with his guests. Blindfolded and bound, Orinda and Perryn were dragged to the heart of Castle

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Hunadora's dungeons. There, there bonds and blindfolds were removed, and they were informed by Gundar that if they could escape the castle's walls, they would be allowed to go freely. As a token of fairness, the castle gates would be left open. All they had to do was walk through them . . . and stay ahead of Gundar's "hounds": vampiric slaves that would be pursuing them through the stone corridors . . .

Orinda and Perryn began to desperately run through the unfamiliar castle, with Gundar's laughter echoing behind them and his slaves materializing from the shadows to nip at their heels. For hours the game went on, the vampires coming close enough that the two could feel the coldness of their bodies, only to drop back again, laughing and hissing in mockery, while Perryn and Orinda tried desperately to gain some sense of their bearings. Finally, they emerged in the courtyard, the massive gate open before them as promised . . . and Gundar's slaves decided that the game had gone on long enough. Rushing forward at inhuman speeds, they closed on the two as they dashed madly for freedom . . .

Perryn, recognizing that all was lost, stopped suddenly and threw himself backward into the surging mass of vampires, screaming an exhortation to Orinda to keep going and not look back. Gundar's slaves, thirsting for blood, fell upon Perryn like a pack of wolves, Orinda temporarily forgotten in the frenzy of feeding. Moments later, when Perryn's bloodless body was dropped to the ground, several of them realized their error and dashed forward to stop her. One of them dug its claws into her left leg, tearing muscle and draining a draught of Orinda's life with its cold touch. She fell forward, steeling herself for her death . . .

Death, of course, never came. Her momentum carried her forward even as the vampire grabbed hold of her, and she fell onto the soft earth outside the castle's gate. The vampire slave reluctantly released her, unwilling to flout Gundar's commands, and withdrew back into the castle. Orinda, sobbing and bleeding, dragged herself forward across the grass and dirt, unable to stand. Her slow progress was soon halted as a man suddenly stood before her. Looking up, she saw Gundar's smiling visage. In his arms, he held Perryn's savaged corpse.

"Congratulations," the Duke whispered. "You have earned your life, at the expense of his." The Duke regarded the body in his hands, then dropped it roughly to the earth. "You may want to see that this is properly disposed of . . . or you could wait. Perhaps your love might return to you." Gundar's mocking, brutish laugh stayed behind as his form disintegrated into mist and disappeared.

With Gundar gone, Orinda set about bandaging her leg, and fashioned a crude crutch from the dead branch of a tree. She hobbled to a nearby village, where she

managed to steal a horse. Returning to Hunadora on horseback, she gathered up Perryn's corpse and rode to Zeidenburg, where she had his body cremated. She then continued on to her homeland, Kartakass.

She thought about returning to Skald, but decided against it, and instead headed to Chord, a tiny village in northwestern Kartakass. Her fame preceded her even there, and the following year she won the village's meistersingerhip with ease. Even now, over forty years later, she remains the meistersinger of Chord, and easily its most famed and beloved citizen.

Current Sketch

Orinda remains the meistersinger of Chord, and is accorded the amount of respect one would expect given her station, age and reputation. She is well loved by the people, and it has been over a decade since anyone bothered to challenge her for the meistersingership. Since her singing ability and musical talent has not diminished with the years, it is unlikely anyone could unseat her even if they chose to try.

Chord is a small village, with its economy built around brewing. Meekulbern and other fermentable berries and plants grows abundantly around it. Thus, the village enjoys greater prosperity than one might expect for such a small settlement (population 65). The primary hardship experienced by the villagers is wolf attacks, but Orinda has seen to it that the local militia is well-prepared to deal with them when they occur.

Personality

As a meistersinger, Orinda is fair but firm. She considers all advice but doesn't give an inch once a decision's been made. So far, the villagers have no complaint about her as a leader or a judge.

On a one-to-one basis, Orinda is kindly and generous. Any visitors to Chord will be invited to stay at her home, as she loves having guests. She still loves singing, and loves telling stories as well. Her tales of her time as a monster hunter can be quite gripping.

Orinda's only vice is her growing consumption of meekulbrau. Unlike most Kartakans, Orinda never developed a taste for it, but her late husband Perryn loved it. Whenever she is alone, she tends to open a cask, letting the smell and taste conjure up memories of her love. She never drinks in public, however.

Orinda has not heard that Duke Gundar was resurrected recently, and if the gods are kind that news will be kept from her until her death. The news that Gundar had been destroyed and his domain carved up eased a great deal of her ongoing pain over Perryn's death, and hearing that the monster has managed to cheat

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his own destruction will bring the pain surging forth again.

Combat

While she was a fierce fighter in her youth, Orinda is far too old for combat now. Now, her best defense is her standing in Chord. Anyone seeking to harm Orinda will have to wade through several dozen angry villagers.

Orinda's thieving skills are negligible now. Her lame leg and aged body prevent her from climbing walls dexterously, and her hearing has faded to the point where she can't detect noise with any special ability. She can still pick pockets with some skill (30%), and her ability to read languages has only grown with time (85%). She retains all other bardic skills, including the ability to cast spells. She has gathered an impressive spell list over the years; its contents are up to the Dungeon Master, but most of them will deal with monster hunting or performing.

Using Orinda

Visitors to Kartakass will find Chord a welcome and pleasant place to rest as long as Orinda is the meistersinger. Orinda is a fabulous hostess, happily providing lodging, food and drink, and entertainment in the form of songs and stories. She also has a great deal of information and experience to impart; she has looked several of the Core's darklords right in the eye, and will provide whatever aid she can to a prospective monster hunter.

Things will change a bit should Orinda discover that Duke Gundar walks the Core. Unwilling to go to her grave while her husband's killer still stalks the living, she will do anything in her power to drag him back to Hell before she passes on. Since she is far too old to deal with him herself, she would instead search out a group of adventurers. Orinda does not want any innocent lives on her conscience, so she would only employ those she thought capable, but her desire for vengeance might cloud her judgment in this regard . . .

TALLWICH – THE GIANT OF NARTOK

Appearance

A

n attractive member of his species, Tallwich is incredibly ugly by human standards. He stands a shade over nine feet tall, with a muscular build, though his height makes him look lithe. He is completely bald, from head to toe, with

light tan skin. His head is disproportionately large by human standards, and his pointed ears are high on his head, sitting even with the temples of his wide forehead. His features are large and grotesque, especially his wide mouth and large, flat teeth.

Unlike most members of his species, Tallwich is not a warrior and so does not wear armor or carry any weapons. His only clothing are his sandals and a brown, hooded robe that ends midway down his shins. It has no sleeves, only holes for his arms.

Tallwich

7th-Level Voadkyn Shaman, Chaotic Good

Armor Class	8	Str	18
Movement	12	Dex	16
Level/Hit Dice	7	Con	10
Hit Points	28	Int	11
THAC0	16	Wis	16
Morale	11	Cha	10
No. of Attacks	1		
Damage/Attack	1d6		
Special Attacks	See below		
Special Defenses	See below		
Magic Resistance	Nil		

Background

Ravenloft is a land rich with folklore, impossible tales sprung forth from the fertile, frightened imagination of peasants and townsfolk vainly trying to achieve some scrap of understanding of a world so frequently beyond their control. However, more often than one might expect, the stories told in hushed whispers by firelight sometimes hold an element of truth, and can serve as warnings or guidance to those wise enough to heed the words. Even more rare is the tale which has nothing to do with the grim and ghastly, ending with the death of some fool lacking the sense he was born with, but is instead a tale of hope, giving the teller and listener both the faith to continue through one more despair-filled year. The tale of the Giant of Nartok is one such tale.

It is not a tale which has been told long. Though the townspeople of Nartok will claim to a soul that the Giant has always been there, shepherding the weak and healing the sick, those blessed with a decent memory and who have been through those parts before could tell you that no tales were told of the Giant before last winter. The townspeople won't abide such talk, of course; they know their Giant has always watched over them.

Those who travel to Nartok hoping for a glimpse of the legendary Giant are doomed to disappointment and no small amount of heckling by the townspeople. The Giant, as any fool knows, does not live in Nartok itself, but rather in the forest to the southwest. You needn't bother

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gathering supplies and hiring trackers, however; the Giant is never found by those who seek him out. Only the lost and wounded in Nartok's sinister Forest of Shadows can expect a visit from the Giant, and then for only as long as it takes him to heal their wounds or point them in the direction of home. Then he vanishes once more into the trees, never having said a word.

How, one might ask, can a giant (whom the townspeople insist stands thirteen feet from sandals to crown) possibly stay so hidden in a relatively small patch of forest? And where did he come from? How exactly does he heal the sick and injured? Question such as these will draw nothing but a hostile stare from the people of Nartok and a curt instruction to go talk to Coby Daedin. All doubters are sent to Coby Daedin, who can rarely answer the many skeptical questions but who will eagerly tell all comers the story of how he met the Giant, face to face.

As Daedin tells it, he was in the forest a few seasons back, hunting for deer in the early morning. After several unproductive hours, he finally chanced upon a target: a strong, healthy buck, at least thirteen point, drinking from a small spring.

Daedin's first arrow hit the beast in the back haunch, slowing it enough for him to keep pace as it clumsily fled. Still, it took half of his quiver to finally bring the beast down. When the animal collapsed to the ground, Daedin approached with his knife drawn, ready to put it out of its misery if it still lived, when it reared up to its feet and drove one of its antlers into his gut. It was Daedin who fell to the ground this time, hands clutched to his stomach as blood ran past his fingers, while the buck staggered on only to collapse and die a few yards away.

Daedin lay there for what must have been hours, waiting in agony to finally die, as the sunlight that made it passed the leaves burnt a speckled red pattern on his flesh and the ants and flies began to gather, attracted by the scent of bloodied meat. Then, a huge shadow passed over him, and he believed for a moment that his worst fear had come to pass; that rather than a relatively peaceful death, some forest predator had stumbled upon him and found an easy meal.

Instead, he felt a large hand fall on his shoulder and gently turn him onto his back. Daring to open his eyes, he looked up and saw the largest, ugliest man he had ever seen kneeling down, hunched over him . . . until he looked closer at the jaw, and the ears, and realized that it was no man at all. A scream rose up in his throat, only to be choked down by his own blood.

The giant paid little attention to Daedin's panic, instead concentrating on his injury. Pulling away Daedin's hands, covered with blood both dried and fresh, the giant substituted his own, closed his eyes and muttered several words in a flowing language that Daedin didn't recognize. He felt a tingling in his stomach, felt

the pain diminish and then vanish, and felt his breathing slow and deepen. Miraculously, the giant had healed his wounds.

Daedin was still too weak from heat and hunger to make it back to Nartok, and the giant seemed to recognize this. Picking him up carefully in its huge arms, it walked him back to the outskirts of the town, leaving him at the edge of the woods before disappearing back into them. Daedin walked slowly back into town, and the legend of the Giant of Nartok was born.

The Giant's real name is Tallwich, and he has been living in the Nartok woods for less than a year. He was born on a distant Prime Material world, where he was the shaman of a small band of voadkyn (known more commonly as wood giants). Tallwich's clan lived nomadically in the huge stretches of forest on his native world, and as shaman Tallwich was responsible for contacting the band's ancestor spirits and learning from them where the clan should move to next.

On one such occasion, the spirits directed Tallwich and the band to a large patch of old growth forest, where the trees seemed to stretch endlessly upwards and the air was calm and quiet. It seemed an excellent place to camp for a few weeks, and Tallwich was pleased and grateful to the spirits for their goodwill. While his fellows slept that night on the forest ground, Tallwich spent the night communing with the spirits, expressing his gratitude and making offerings. During this communion, a thick, heavy mist materialized, seemingly out of nowhere, in the midst of the trees a few yards away from where Tallwich was sitting. The spirits fell suddenly silent, and Tallwich sat there alone with his thoughts. Deciding that this sudden mist must be an omen, Tallwich rose to investigate . . .

When the finally mists cleared from around him, Tallwich found himself alone in an unfamiliar and sinister part of the forest. The trees were unusual, the air had a different feel to it, and his bandmates were no where to be found. Though he couldn't have known it, Tallwich had been abducted by the Mists of Ravenloft.

Current Sketch

Tallwich has deduced that he was somehow removed from his home and deposited elsewhere, but most everything else remains a mystery to him. He believes that the spirits betrayed him, a belief compounded by the fact that he can no longer contact the ancestor spirits of his band. In the absence of their aid, Tallwich has made contact with a few local nature spirits. These spirits are strange and unsettling compared to the one's of his native world, but they have provided him with their guidance and a share of their power.

Confused and frightened, Tallwich does his best to avoid everyone. He wanders the stretch of forest between Nartok and Stangengrad, hiding from the few souls he

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encounters. So far, only the sight of someone in pain or in need of aid has been able to draw him out of hiding.

Tallwich speaks none of the Core's languages. His native language is somewhat similar to Tepestani in sound and structure, but the two languages have no words in common.

Personality

Almost completely isolated from meaningful interaction with other sentient beings, Tallwich is predictably depressed. This combines with his profound guilt over having "abandoned" the rest of his clan and his constant anxiety over the strangeness and newness of his surroundings to make him deeply melancholy, even slightly paranoid. Not even able to trust his own surroundings, or the spirits whose guidance was once so precious to him, Tallwich is suspicious of anyone he sees and does all he can to avoid their attention.

However, Tallwich is by nature a helpful, caring individual, traits even his current despair cannot drive this out of him completely. It is this innate desire to help and guide his fellow creatures that led him onto the path of the shaman, and continues to lead him to help those who clearly need his aid.

Combat

Tallwich's first strategy in combat is to avoid it. Aiding him in this are his natural voadkyn abilities: he can *polymorph* at will into any humanoid figure (3' to 15' in height), he can move absolutely silently in forested areas (-4 to opponents' surprise rolls), and, when standing still, he can blend into the surrounding vegetation so that only those who can detect invisibility can spot him.

Tallwich's next tactic is intimidation. He will take the largest, most frightening shape he can think of and try to scare off his attackers. Only if that tactic fails will he engage in real combat, and even then always with escape first on his mind.

Tallwich's spells are as follows:

1st level: *bind fetish**, *casting out**, *circle of protection from spirits**, *understand curse**

2nd level: *bless*, *cure light wounds*, *transfer offense**

3rd level: *perfect perception**, *speak with animals*

4th level: *cure disease*

*: Spell found in the *Shaman* accessory.

As a shaman, Tallwich's spells never change; they are permanent gifts from the spirits. Only by beseeching the spirits for different powers can Tallwich's spell slots ever change, and doing so requires a very, very compelling reason. However, unlike priests, Tallwich can

cast each of his spells more than once per day. Each time he casts a spell he must make a Wisdom check; success means that the spell is not lost and can be cast again that day. Each casting after the first imposes a cumulative +1 penalty on the check. Tallwich regains all spent spells after a full night's sleep.

Tallwich has 90% resistance to *sleep* and *charm* spells. He has infravision to 90 feet.

Using Tallwich

Tallwich is undoubtedly one of the strangest individuals one could encounter in the Demiplane or Dread, and that is quite a statement. The only one of his kind in the Land of Mists, it is a certainty that no one who encounters him is likely to have any idea what exactly he is. A Dungeon Master using Tallwich should play up his mystery. He is never seen unless he chooses to be seen, and he rarely chooses to be seen.

How, then, to introduce Tallwich into a campaign, given his penchant for remaining apart? Despite Tallwich's best efforts, he could not remain hidden forever. Already tales of the benevolent "Giant of Nartok" are spreading through Necropolis and into Falkovnia and Lamordia. His "miraculous healing powers" are the subject of many a tale, and many are those who enter the forests in search of a cure for some disease or disfigurement. Tallwich is able to avoid nearly all of those who search for him, but the forest is only so big and there are only so many places to hide. Should the player characters find themselves in need of a "miraculous healing", they may be the ones to locate the Giant. It will then remain to be seen what aid he can give them.

It is also possible that Tallwich might locate them. No forest in Ravenloft is without danger; the Forest of Shadows, in part of which Tallwich resides, is far more dangerous than most. Many unnatural things stalk the night woods, and should the player characters be traveling through them they may find themselves the hunted. Tallwich, as eremitic as he is, will not stand by and watch any traveler be devoured in the night.

Finally, one must consider the people of Nartok and Stangengrad, the two towns closest to Tallwich's demesnes. Though they look favorably upon their beloved Giant for now, the mysterious and strange does not stay close to the hearts or Ravenloft's people for long. How long before the Giant of Nartok is blamed for sickness and misfortune? How long before those who venture into the forests go, not in search of Tallwich's aid, but instead in search of his head? Even the less superstitious might have reasons for seeking to capture or kill the legendary Giant. The Carnival would certainly find him a fabulous freak, and Professor Arcanus could make a pretty penny by adding him to his traveling show,

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while Galf Kloggin, the wererat who fancies the Forest of Shadows his, might not take kindly to a forest specter bringing hope to the people he is trying to keep under his thumb. The player characters could find themselves called on to aid these capture attempts, or compelled to hinder them.

THE KNIGHTS OF THE ASHEN BOUGH

A Neutral Good Secret Society

A Falkovnian secret society, the Knights of the Ashen Bough are named for the trees of eastern Falkovnia, one of which is rumored to burst into a pillar of flames for every person executed by Vlad Drakov.

Membership

Members of the Knights of the Ashen Bough must be of good alignment. Neutral Good and Chaotic Good are most common. Most of the members are rogues, with many being priests of good alignment. There are a few mages, and a few warriors, followers of Marshal Vorbel in quiet rebellion against Drakov. There are no ability requirements, but high mental attributes (Intelligence, Wisdom and Charisma) are considered a definite asset.

Recognition

The Knights have developed a fairly sophisticated range of hand signals that serve not only to identify fellow members but also to convey short, simple messages without the need of speech. This “language”, available only to members, can be bought with a modern language proficiency.

The Knights try to keep their knowledge of other members restricted to what is absolutely necessary for operation. The Knights accept that anyone caught will reveal everything they know under the hideous tortures of Drakov’s soldiers, and restricting the knowledge of members reduces the risks associated with being caught.

Activities

Despite the name, the Knights of the Ashen Bough are not a military organization. Rather, they serve as an underground railroad of sorts, funneling those trying to escape the tyranny of Drakov out of the cities and into neighboring domains. Many of those they rescue are demihumans trying to escape slavery; others are escaped criminals falsely accused or victimized by unjust laws (of which Falkovnia has many) or even peasants simply in

search of a better life elsewhere. Because it is illegal for natives to cross the borders of Falkovnia into other domains, the service the Knights provide (for free) is an important one, and a dangerous one.

The Knights have a variety of tools at their disposal when it comes to sneaking refugees out of Falkovnia. One of the most important tools is the organization’s small number of foreign members. Because foreigners are generally allowed to travel freely, members from neighboring domains form an important part of the Knights’ network. Falkovnian natives and foreigners can be easily distinguished thanks to the eagle tattoos on the natives’ foreheads, so foreign members are often given the responsibility of actually taking refugees across the border. A covered wagon and many healthy bribes can allow a foreigner to sneak large numbers of Falkovnians across the borders. Perhaps even more valuable are the Knights’ few mage members. Spells of invisibility, illusion and flight have bought many refugees safety.

To aid in their activities, the Knights have developed an extensive network of contacts throughout Falkovnia and into the neighboring domains. To limit the chances of discovery, these contacts are almost never developed in the name of the Knights; rather, the individual agents always try to convey the impression that they are laboring in their own personal interests. Contacts have been made with criminal guilds, both in Falkovnia and abroad, who are often more than willing to flout Drakov’s laws in return for gold, merchants and traders who are not averse to a little smuggling on the side, and in some cases even political and military figures.

Drakov and his minions are aware of the existence of the Knights; the Knights are good enough that they are almost never caught, but the few who have been have been thoroughly interrogated before being executed. However, Drakov has no idea just how extensive the organization is.

Organization

The Knights try to stay as disorganized as possible while still remaining an effective network, and they walk a precarious line as a result. Too much organization puts the Knights at serious risk of being captured en masse, while too little organization hampers their intercommunication and seriously hinders their effectiveness. After much experimentation, the Knights feel they have struck an effective balance.

The nominal leader of the Knights is Marshal Oswald Vorbel, a high-ranking officer in the Falkovnian military who founded the organization three decades ago. Since then, it has expanded far beyond what he possibly could have hoped. As the Knights have grown in size and effectiveness, he has been forced to limit his involvement with the group for fear that his proximity to Drakov and

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his soldiers could put all of them at risk. He now has little to do with the running of the Knights at all, but on the few occasions he decides to step in his recommendations are generally followed.

The actual leadership of the Knights falls to the Captains, of which there are four. Each Captain resides in one of Falkovnia's major settlements, and is responsible for directing the Knights' actions in that city and the surrounding area. Their main responsibilities are recruitment and the allocation of resources. Each Captain has four to eight soldiers under his command, but they avoid coming into direct contact with their subordinates. Instead, they will usually choose one of their soldiers as a liaison to the others; the liaison will pass along the Captain's orders, and the other soldiers will most likely never meet their Captain. The soldiers are the rank and file of the Knights, and those who are responsible for actually getting people out of Falkovnia. They are given a high degree of freedom in their actions; generally they will only need a Captain's intercession when they have need of resources they cannot otherwise acquire (money, horses, a covered wagon, etc.).

Because each soldier is unlikely to know more than one or perhaps two of his fellows, they are forced to develop elaborate networks of contacts, people outside the group who are kept in the dark about its existence and activities but who nevertheless are used to its advantage. An individual soldier might have contacts in the local thieves' guild, with local merchants, or might even have a "drinking buddy" or two among Drakov's soldiers. Thus, the Knight's influence is greater than their small numbers might indicate.

Headquarters

The Knights of the Ashen Bough have no formal headquarters, and almost never gather together in large numbers; the risks are simply too great. When necessary, instructions are passed through word of mouth. For the most part, though, instructions are not needed; each member of the Knights simply does his best to help any refugees in his sphere of influence.

Notable Personalities

MARSHAL OSWALD

VORBEL

Appearance

In an amazing shape despite his incredible age, Oswald Vorbel cuts an impressive figure, particularly in full military dress; he rarely wears anything else. He stands an impressive 6'1", despite the fact that he has started to hunch slightly with age, and his frame is nearly as broad and muscular as it was in his prime. Still, a close observer can see the signs that Vorbel is not much longer for this world. He moves with a careful deliberation that reveals the pain in his joints, his once rock-steady hands have a noticeable shake, and a close listener can hear the rattling wheeze in his breath. His body would likely have surrendered to age long ago, but his incredible force of will keeps him going, and going strong, until he finally burns out completely.

Marshal Oswald Vorbel

14th-Level Human Fighter, Neutral Good

Armor Class	10	Str	14
Movement	12	Dex	11
Level/Hit Dice	14	Con	11
Hit Points	63	Int	17
THAC0	6	Wis	15
Morale	16	Cha	15
No. of Attacks	2		
Damage/Attack	By weapon		
Special Attacks	Nil		
Special Defenses	Nil		
Magic Resistance	Nil		

Background

Oswald Vorbel has been a follower of Vlad Drakov for over six decades. He was with Drakov when the Mists first brought the Talons of the Hawk into the Land of the Mists, and ever since has served him as one of his most trusted, most respected and highest ranking military officers. Though clearly nearing the end of his military career (he is over eighty years old, and has not aged nearly as well as Drakov has) he remains one of Drakov's favored military officers. He is also Falkovnia's most highly placed traitor.

Vorbel joined up with Drakov at a young age, driven by visions of the excitement of travel and the glory of battle. It did not take long for him to become disillusioned and jaded by the true horrors of warfare, but he had a natural talent for both the grit of actual combat

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and the larger world of tactics and logistics that served him well over the years.

Vorbel had never been comfortable with Drakov's more bloodthirsty tendencies, and control of his own nation has only made Drakov worse. Before, Vorbel could rationalize Drakov's excesses; they served to demoralize the enemy and discourage mutiny among the men, and the Talons were ill-equipped to care for prisoners anyway. In Falkovnia, however, against an innocent peasantry, the old flimsy rationales utterly failed, and Vorbel was forced to confront the horrors he had been denying for so long. Finally unable to support Drakov any longer, but realizing that an open repudiation would result in his death, Vorbel found a way to hinder the pogroms from within. In 723, he gathered several like-minded soldiers under his command and founded the Knights of the Ashen Bough, a group with the goal of funneling innocents beyond Drakov's reach.

Current Sketch

The Knights have been more successful than Vorbel could have hoped, and have become a network sophisticated enough that they should persist long after his death. In fact, he now has little involvement with the Knights' operations, trusting their direction to a number of trustworthy individuals spread across the domain. He has intentionally limited his involvement over time, reasoning that his high visibility could hinder the organization in the long run. Still, when he chooses to become directly involved, the Knights listen to his every command.

Additionally, Vorbel hinders Drakov in ways not related to the Knights whenever possible. He is still among Drakov's highest ranking and most trusted military officers, and he uses this position to every possible advantage. For example, in military campaigns against Falkovnia's neighbors, it always seems that the cruelest and most cold-hearted of the officers under Vorbel's command get the most dangerous assignments.

Recently, Vorbel met clandestinely with Gondegal, leader of the Knights of the Shadows. An informal alliance between the two groups of Knights has begun; with Gondegal striking at Drakov overtly and Vorbel undermining Drakov's military from within, this alliance may prove very effective.

Personality

Vorbel is gruff and distant; he never lets anyone get too close. He does his best not to let his disgust for Drakov and his regime show, but rather than risk it he simply avoids personal contact as much as he can.

On the battlefield, the fiery energy of Vorbel's youth begins to shine through once more. In honorable combat,

he can often be seen smiling or laughing, with a genuine twinkle in his eye.

Combat

Vorbel is still a competent warrior, but he has always been most dangerous in the general's tent. He is an outstanding strategist with an intuitive grasp of military science. If not for the supreme power of Ravenloft's darklords in their domains, he and Drakov could likely have marched across the Core by now. Of course, Vorbel himself has no desire to add to Drakov's holdings.

In personal combat, Vorbel fights with a broadsword and shield, from horseback whenever possible. He prefers chain mail armor, but wears plate when the circumstances call for it (usually no more than half plate; he is elderly, after all).

Bela Mitrovic, hf, T9 (Invisible*): AC 10; MV 12; hp 28; THAC0 16; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon; SZ M (5'10"); ML champion (15); Str 12, Dex 14, Con 11, Int 16, Wis 13, Cha 15; AL NG.

Personality: Dedicated and Intense

* Kit found in *Champions of the Mists*

Bela Mitrovic has been a member of the Knights for over ten years, and is one of its most valuable agents. She is a soldier in the Silbervas area, and her remarkable skills have been the salvation of many of that city's unfortunates . . . and the elimination of those who have tried to interfere.

Bela is very tight-lipped about her past; asking about her life before the Knights is a sure way to get on her bad side. She gets even more annoyed with those ask about her name, which happens often; Bela is, after all, a boy's name. She doesn't appreciate it when people point this out.

Aldo Phence, hm, W10: AC 10; MV 12; hp 22; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon; SZ M (5'8"); ML Average (10); Str 9, Dex 12, Con 11, Int 18, Wis 12, Cha 10; AL NG.

Personality: bookish, compassionate

Aldo is one of the few mages in the Knights, and is extremely important to the organization as a result. Too valuable to be risked in the "field", Aldo spends most of his time researching new spells to help in funneling refugees to other domains. His current project is a spell to remove tattoos and brands, so that Falkovnian refugees can be free of the stigma that marks them as chattel.

Aldo is quiet and thoughtful, and believes strongly in the importance of rational thought and logical action, but

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despite this he is easily moved emotionally and is deeply sympathetic to the plight of his fellow Falkovnians.

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WAYWARD ON THE BONE SANDS

They Hope You'll Stay for Dinner

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THE STORY OF WAYWARD

Caleb Wicks

Even at ten years of age, Caleb Wicks was mostly fearless, and therefore powerful. He was a precocious bundle of energy and unrepentantly disruptive young man, with a glib tongue and a steely self-possession that, in the end, bent other people's wills to his own. He was never known to heed his parents, teachers, or playmates. When authority figures of any sort disciplined Caleb, the child responded only with sullen shrugs and viperish glances. Since Caleb was insensitive to punishment of every sort, there was no apparent way to keep him out of trouble short of tying him to a post (a suggestion put forth with surprising regularity).

Who can say why these things were true of Caleb? Caleb's father, Ornette, was a hard, pragmatic man (albeit a civil one) and a teacher of rhetoric to the children of the upper classes. Perhaps Caleb inherited some of his bull-headedness from the paternal corner. Caleb's more mannered older brother, Horatio, had certainly acquired Ornette's eloquence, and Caleb himself was developing the same skill. Horatio was appalled by his sibling's serial disobedience. The elder brother often would use his quick tongue to form the two simple words that he knew would strike fear into Caleb's heart and cause Caleb to walk the straight and narrow, if only for the moment. Those words were "Black Hat".

Black Hat the Swordslinger was an infamous villain and all-around bogeyman in the parts where Caleb grew up. Dressed entirely in midnight black, including a wide-brimmed hat pulled down to conceal his eyes at all times, it was rumored that Black Hat would assail strangers—men, women, and children alike—on dark, lonely

avenues. He would carve them up into little pieces with his two long blades and devour the bite-sized remains so as to leave no evidence of his horrible crimes. No one could tell a Black Hat story around the hearth better than Horatio Wicks and Horatio exploited that gift to terrorize his young brother whenever Caleb's behavior seemed to warrant it. Horatio could reduce Caleb to cowering in three minutes flat once the talk of Black Hat began. Caleb deeply resented the power that his brother lorded over him, but, nevertheless, the boy could not conquer his fear of the Black Hat legend. In a short time, Caleb came to despise Horatio as much as he feared Black Hat.

The Bone Sands

One day, the lord of the Hangingshire requested that Ornette Wicks teach the lord's son the art of rhetoric. Ornette was obliged to pack up his family and relocate to the far-flung, frontier shire. The long trek to the seat of the rugged shire required a dangerous passage through the desert called the Bone Sands. Along the way, during a sudden sandstorm, the Wicks family wagon became separated from the caravan with which it was traveling. Before Ornette could bring the wagon to a halt, the vehicle veered over the edge of a tall, steep dune. The wagon was damaged beyond repair, and so was Horatio when he was thrown from the coach and grievously injured. The family was lost on the blazing wastes of the Bone Sands.

At first, while they waited for the caravan to send a search party after them, Ornette, his wife, Carolina, and his two sons were able to survive on the flesh of the horses that had drawn their wagon. When this food ran out, and no help came to the stranded group, Ornette saw that he was left with no choice but to try to walk out of the desert. Unfortunately, Horatio's injuries were such

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that he could not be moved. In fact, it was very likely that he would die in short order.

After as much rumination as the dire circumstances would allow for, Ornette told Carolina that they would wait until Horatio died and then use his remains for sustenance on the journey out of the Bone Sands. It was a terrible choice for a father to come to, but, Ornette reasoned, at least Horatio could be of some use to his family in this way. Ornette tried to keep the knowledge of this decision from both of his sons. Nonetheless, Caleb snooped it out, and, at night, just before bed, he taunted his brother with the whispered tale. Upon learning his fate, Horatio let out a holler that was sure to wake Ornette and Carolina, who had already retired for the evening in the battered shell of the wagon. Caleb knew that he would get in trouble for this mess. Incensed by Horatio's cries and desperate to silence them, Caleb's hand closed around the cooking knife that had been left by the campfire beside the wagon. Caleb skewered Horatio on his sick bed.

Ornette and Carolina were distraught beyond words, but what could they do with their ten year-old son now? That was always the question where Caleb was concerned. What could be done? Nothing at all, Caleb knew, but to carry on with the plan to draw life from Horatio's death. The Wicks supped on the flesh of their own flesh and blood. Caleb thought that this was an especially fitting and delicious irony.

The trio broke camp the next day. Unfortunately, another sandstorm kicked up without warning and Caleb was separated from his parents. With no food and no companions, Caleb stumbled around the desert for several torturous days. Late one night, quite by accident, tiny, wasted Caleb drifted into the town of Wayward on the Bone Sands like so much tumbleweed.

Wayward

The boy was mad with hunger. Caleb was approached on the dark street by a kindly townsman who was alarmed by the youth's frightful, pitiable appearance. Caleb saw the stranger as an opportunity to sate his hunger. When the citizen drew near, Caleb slew the man with the same cutting knife with which Horatio had been killed and carved. Caleb feasted on raw flesh and then ran off to hide until the dawn.

In the morning, the people of Wayward found the body of the murdered man, who happened to have been the town crier. Caleb abandoned his hiding place and appeared in the midst of the crowd surrounding the body. As always, Caleb sought to avoid punishment for his misdeed. He explained that he had been kidnapped and brought to Wayward by none other than Black Hat the Swordslinger. Caleb said that he saw Black Hat kill the crier.

The townspeople hardly could doubt the strange boy's story; the youngster himself surely was not capable of the gruesome crime that confronted them. All the citizens of Wayward adopted Caleb. Caleb managed to stay out of trouble for an entire year and during that time he became an extremely popular member of the community. As he did not need to employ his keen wit to cover up his wrongdoing, he instead could channel his cunning into charming his newfound extended family.

The Waywarders were in need of a new town crier and message-runner. Caleb's boundless, youthful energy and his bright-as-a-gold-piece voice made the boy the obvious choice to fill the position. Caleb took to his new job with relish, as it gave him license to be smack dab in the middle of other people's affairs on a regular basis; under similar circumstances in the past, he always had been chastised for meddling.

The Lean Times

Several miles from Wayward, a quiet gnomish community thrived beneath the Bone Sands. The name of the village was Rumbleton, because minor earth tremors sometimes rattled the region. Rumbleton's sages had divined that no such quake ever would be strong enough to threaten the safety of their homes. Unfortunately, these experts were mistaken. One day a powerful tremor struck and it brought Rumbleton's sandy ceiling down on the heads of its inhabitants. The lives of many gnomes were lost in the disaster.

Those gnomes who survived the catastrophe went to the human settlement of Wayward to plead for sanctuary while they tried to put their shaken lives back in order. They received the shelter that they sought, but improving their miserable situation was no easy task. Rumbleton had been built in the only stable, accessible ground for countless miles around. The gnomes had nowhere to go to reestablish a new permanent home. Their time in Wayward unexpectedly stretched into months, and then into more than a year.

The gnomish refugees began to start families in Wayward and put down roots. The small town could not support the dramatic increase in population. Survival had always been tenuous on the Bone Sands. Now resources, especially food, became dangerously scarce. The Lean Times had begun.

The town elders did not know what to do about the famine. Too many people were going without. The Waywarders gradually became hostile toward their gnomish guests. These un-neighborly sentiments were stirred up by the daily reports of their roguishly charismatic, eleven year-old town crier, Caleb Wicks. During the Lean Times, it was Caleb's responsibility to provide detailed information about the state of the town's dwindling supplies. Caleb also kept careful count of the

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number of gnomes being born in the gnomish shanty quarter of Wayward.

One day, Caleb announced that an “emergency” meeting “for humans only” was convening to discuss a “course of action” in response to the “gnomish threat”. The town crier was present at the meeting. The hungry Waywarders were surprisingly receptive to Caleb’s suggestion that they eat some of the gnomish babies. After all, Caleb argued, the gnomish infants could contribute nothing to the town’s welfare in its time of great need. And, besides, weren’t they just the perfect size to fit in the townspeople’s cooking pots and on their dinner plates, both of which had been empty too often as of late? Caleb could not remember when Wayward had invited these “extra” gnomes into the community. The newborn gnomes were as dangerous as an invading army. By eating them, something good might yet be born out of this tragedy.

Although Caleb’s proposal sparked heated discussion, it was (of course!) rejected as the misguided musings of a well-intentioned child. But as the week passed and word of the town crier’s suggestion reached the gnomes, animosity grew hot between human and gnome. The survivors of Rumbleton were understandably enraged by Caleb’s ghoulish recommendation. The little people became suspicious of their human hosts.

In turn, the Waywarders took offense at the gnomes’ indignation. The gnomes stayed in Wayward at the humans’ clemency. How dare these poor vagrants dictate how their benefactors would resolve the problem that the refugees themselves had caused? Perhaps, the citizens of Wayward thought, some of the gnomish children should be taken, if only to teach the parents a lesson in self-control.

Meanwhile, Caleb continued to mouth supporting arguments for his plan, both in private encounters with influential townspeople and in his public reports. One night, a gang of gnomes attacked Caleb. He was badly injured, but quickly returned to running messages around town. The Waywarders gasped at the bruises and abrasions that they saw every day on Caleb’s adorable, boyish face; the injuries were a constant reminder of the assault. Although Caleb’s assailants were known to him, he would not identify them. Caleb testified that he had not seen who had assaulted him. Therefore, every gnome was a suspect.

There was more violence. Humans set fire to several gnomish shanties. Many gnomes died, as did a handful of the arsonists in the retaliatory brawl that took place on the streets of the shantytown.

The Feast

Caleb stated his case plainly. Human blood had been spilled. The gnomes would never leave Wayward. The

gnomish children would grow up to be enemies of the human community. Some Waywarders already had the good idea of burning the gnomes’ houses. Now it was time to do the same to the occupants of those shacks. They should cook the gnomish children and grow healthy again on their sweet flesh.

The people of Wayward thought that their charismatic town crier made very good sense. Caleb saw the situation with the innocent clarity of youth. The Feast would be cause for a celebration the likes of which the town had not seen since before the Lean Times began. If Wayward was going to do this desperate thing, let it be done in the spirit of unity. A large force of men was assigned the task of rounding up the babies. The goodwives would do the cooking. In his role as town crier, Caleb invited each and every citizen of Wayward to gather at the town hall for the Feast. Clever Caleb would act as honorary master of the ceremony. And if any gnomes protested the Feast, then they would have to be silenced.

Gnomish resistance was expected, but Caleb and his followers were disappointed when some of the native Waywarders declined to do their civic duty. A group of humans refused to take part in the Feast and they even tried to inform the gnomes of the planned abductions. The resisters were stopped before they could betray Caleb’s cause. The “Advocates of Hunger” were imprisoned in the cellar of the town’s church. Preparations for the Feast proceeded normally.

The deed was done under a full moon. It was a mad night. The dinner bell, struck by Caleb’s small hand, rang out furiously again and again like a banshee’s cry—or a baby’s. Blood and wine flowed like water. The Feast was a disgusting orgy, and at its center was the town crier with the lyrical, bell-like voice, Caleb Wicks. Brandishing the knife he had used to murder his brother, Caleb cut the first serving of the evening, and he was the last to leave the ruined mess hall at dawn.

After the Feast, the gnomish population of Wayward rose up in arms against the monstrous humans who had hunted them. There was savage fighting in the streets of Wayward. All of the outnumbered gnomes were slaughtered within two days. The bodies of adults and children alike were collected and eaten as soon as the life had been hacked out of them, if not sooner. Waste not, want not, Caleb schooled.

After all of the gnomes were eliminated, the human traitors were released from the church cellar and led to the mess hall very much like so many lambs to the slaughter. The rebels shared the same fate as the gnomes that they had tried to protect.

After the last piece of flesh was consumed, the gorged Waywarders slept soundly with their bellies full of hate and evil. Sometime in the small hours of the third night of the full moon, an unlikely fog descended on the

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quiet, bloody town. When the morning came, things had changed in Wayward. Wayward became an Island of Terror in the demiplane of Ravenloft, and its citizens transformed into quevari (*RAVENLOFT MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendices I & II*). Caleb Wicks was the lord of the new domain.

WAYWARD ON THE BONE SANDS

The Land

The domain of Wayward is composed of the town proper surrounded by about five miles of desert in every direction. The desert is home to cacti and a minimal amount of other sorts of desert-blooming vegetation, but mostly it is dominated by blazing hot sands. Temperatures in the desert soar as high as 110 degrees Fahrenheit at midday. The Mists of Ravenloft do not appear at the edges of the desert. Instead, the desert appears to stretch out endlessly to the horizon. This horizon is always obscured by a shimmering heat mirage.

Wayward is built around a deep well. There are small trees throughout the town that provide some meager shade. The Waywarders live in simple clay and brick houses, although there are a few wooden structures. After dark, the center of activity in town is the large mess hall (formerly the town hall) that stands in the northwestern corner of town. The interior walls of the hall are streaked with blood, although during the day the townspeople will attempt to explain this away as the stains of an unfinished paint job.

At the northeastern edge of Wayward, an abandoned church dedicated to the patron saint of the sun bears mute, indignant witness to the dark deeds that are perpetrated in the town each night. The citizens have rejected their former religion altogether, and have vandalized the small church from time to time. The former pastor, Adrian Hood, is now the deeply troubled and conflicted town carpenter; he has had difficulty reconciling his new existence as an evil thing with his former clerical training.

Beside the church is an ill-tended cemetery, complete with fallen and leaning headstones, choking weeds, and defaced holy symbols. Beyond the cemetery, to the north of the town, is the shallow bone pit in which the Waywarders toss the bones of their many victims, including the gnomes of Rumbleton. The townspeople always cover up the top layer of bones, but the depression is noticeable to anyone who comes near.

The burnt-out remains of the gnomish shantytown dominate the southwestern corner of the town. Most of

the shacks were burnt to the ground and the ashes scattered on the wind, but some of the hovels still stand.

The largest house in Wayward belongs to Mayor Jed Loomis. This fine structure is directly across the street from the sheriff's office.

The moon is perpetually full in Wayward. The nights are very long; the moon rises at 5 PM (when the sun sets) and sets at 7 AM the next morning (when the sun rises).

Cultural Level

Chivalric.

The Folk

During the day, life in Wayward is painfully uneventful. Existence is hard in the desert, but the people eke out a living. The folk tend meager gardens and hunt the small animals that live in the desert. There is a saloon called the Lean Times (complete with a dime-store-type wooden orc which is used as a throwing block), a smith, a seamstress, a general store, a carpenter, and all of the other usual trappings of a rugged frontier town. The dark powers provide raw materials that the Waywarders cannot obtain for themselves.

There are no children in Wayward, save for Caleb. When the town entered Ravenloft, all of its human youths were left behind. Moreover, the men and women of the town suddenly found themselves incapable of producing any more offspring, save in those instances when one of the women has given birth to the latest incarnation of Caleb (see above).

Another oddity is that all of the food and drink in Wayward tastes so terrible as to be almost inedible. In fact, characters must make a Constitution check to avoid retching the first time that they taste any food or drink that is either native to the town or brought in from the outside (including heroes' rations). If they fail the check, they develop an aversion to the food and do not wish to consume any more of it. The appearance and smell of the victuals are ordinary in every way. The only thing that tastes as it normally would is the flesh and blood of sentient creatures.

A common insult bandied about by the citizens of Wayward is "The flesh of your mother is stuck in my teeth." If characters raise the ire of any of the townspeople, they are sure to hear this unusual slur. The Waywarders profess that they are at a loss to explain the origin of the insult.

The denizens of Wayward lapse into a sort of hibernation on the third day following the arrival of a visitor in the town. Most of the time, the Waywarders lie dormant, sleeping in their homes and expending almost no energy. Therefore, they require very little sustenance

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and can survive by feeding on the rare stranger or two that drifts into town. When a visitor is brought into the desert surrounding Wayward, Caleb becomes aware of this new presence in his domain and wakes from his sleep. Caleb then runs around town, rousing his neighbors, much as any young boy would do when he wakes up full of energy before anyone else. By the time that the stranger walks down Wayward's main street, the citizens are active and going about their normal daily lives. The Waywarders remain active for three days and nights, corresponding to the three nights of the full moon and the Feast. At the end of the three days, usually after having eaten the strangers who woke them, the citizens fall back asleep.

Native Player Characters

Native player characters from Wayward are not appropriate.

The Law

Caleb Wicks rules the town of Wayward, but during the day he is known only as the town crier. The folk refer to Mayor Jeduthun "Jed" Loomis as their leader. Mayor Loomis heads a council of town elders who write laws and adjudicate trials.

Mayor Loomis' brother, Silas, is the town's sheriff. Silas has two deputies (1st-level fighters) equipped with short swords, clubs, shields, and leather armor.

At night, when the bloodmoon rises, the crazed folk recognize Caleb as their lord and serve him with perfect loyalty.

Encounters

The only dangerous creatures in Wayward are the quevari. The small tract of desert cannot support any natural predators that threaten man. Characters have only a 10% chance per day of having an encounter while wandering the desolate Bone Sands. Common encounters include foxes, hawks, lizards, and moles. Uncommon encounters include quevari, snakes, and vultures.

Lord of Wayward Caleb Wicks

5th-level Quevari Thief, Chaotic Evil

Armor Class	10 (6)	Str	9 (17)
Movement	12	Dex	12 (18)

Level/Hit Dice	5+2	Con	16
Hit Point	40	Int	16
THAC0	14*	Wis	9
No. of Attacks	2/1	Cha	17
Damage/Attack	1d3+4 (w/knife), 1d3+1 (fist)		
Special Attacks	<i>charm person</i> 1/day, <i>Chime of Hunger</i> 3/day (see below)		
Special Defenses	Thief abilities		
Special Vulnerabilities	See below		
Thief Abilities:	MS 85% HS 85% DN 85% CW 95%		

* THAC0 rises to 11 when wielding knives.

Caleb is eleven years old. He is 4'7" tall and painfully, dangerously thin, save for his face which retains a boyish roundness. He has a limp, colorless mop of hair with long, unkempt bangs that sometimes obscure his pale eyes. He has a big, gaping smile. His teeth are surprisingly large, strong, and healthy, given his overall poor physical condition. The scores in parentheses above reflect his abilities when he is under the influence of the bloodmoon.

Caleb never goes without the now-magical knife (see below) with which he killed his brother, Horatio. The long, wide blade, kept in a simple leather sheath, seems to be the sturdiest thing about the bony child.

Current Sketch

During the daylight hours, Caleb is unaware of his status as lord of Wayward. He splits his time between taking classes with the town schoolmarm, Mistress Chatty, and carrying messages and doing odd jobs for the citizenry. He is fed and clothed by the townspeople who dote on him, as they might on any orphaned child. Caleb has no permanent home. While the sun shines, no one speaks of Caleb's position as lord, but the Waywarders will come to the boy's impassioned defense if he is threatened. They rationalize this as the natural reaction of adults to seeing a child in harm's way.

After dark, under the perpetual full moon of Wayward (see below), Caleb falls under the spell of the bloodmoon, as do all of the townspeople. At this time, Caleb behaves in every way as a bloodthirsty killer and a ravenous cannibal. His first priority is to lead the Waywarders in hunting down any travelers who have lingered in town past sundown. Caleb views all strangers as threats to the town, just as he saw the gnomes of Rumbleton.

Caleb retains his paralyzing fear of Black Hat the Swordslinger at all times. Forcibly presenting Caleb with references to that bogeyman (much as one would present a holy symbol to ward off a vampire) require the boy to make an immediate fear check. These references must be

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fairly elaborate; they cannot consist merely of the recitation of the words Black Hat. Appropriate allusions include a short story about Black Hat's atrocities (requiring at least one round to tell), or disguising oneself as the swordsman in front of Caleb; the Dungeon Master should encourage the player characters to be creative. When Caleb fails a fear check, he responds in the standard way, save for the following change: He has no chance (0%) of dropping his knife when he runs away. Note that, like anyone, Caleb gets a +1 to his fear check roll if he faces the same threat more than once in a day.

Forcing Caleb to confront his fear of Black Hat can be a double-edged sword. If Caleb's fear check succeeds, the lord has steeled himself up against the terror and he tries to do the same thing to his would-be tormentor as he did to his brother, Horatio. Caleb fights with a +1 bonus to hit and to damage against characters who have taunted him. Also, since Caleb never purposefully enters melee alone, it is likely that other Waywarders will cover his back if he flees. These quevari fight with a +2 to hit when they are defending their lord, as they are appalled by the torment of a child.

Caleb cannot be killed by any conventional means. If he is reduced to 0 hit points, his body decomposes within minutes. Within a week, one of the women of Wayward will find herself mysteriously pregnant. After a month, she will go into labor just as the bloodmoon rises. The infant she gives birth to is Caleb Wicks reborn. The child develops so rapidly that within another month, he again appears to be eleven years old.

Caleb himself never ages past eleven years. He is trapped in a child's body for all time, although his mind may grow increasingly cunning and ruthless.

Closing the Borders

When Caleb wants his borders sealed, an army of tornadoes whirl to life all across the desert, throwing up sandstorms and making travel out of the town exceedingly lethal. Caleb always closes the borders whenever anyone attempts to leave Wayward.

Combat

Caleb has all of the normal abilities of a quevari, although the dark powers have augmented some of these talents. Caleb's knife is now a *knife* +3. Caleb inflicts 1d3+3 points of damage with each successful knife attack. Furthermore, any wound inflicted by his blade bleeds profusely. A character wounded by the knife loses 2 hit points each round until the wound is bandaged (an act requiring one full round). This effect is cumulative with multiple injuries. For example, a character who suffers three wounds from Caleb's knife automatically loses 6 hit points each round until the wounds are bound. Caleb also

can bite for 1d3+1 points of damage. Whether stabbing or biting, Caleb may attack twice in each round.

Caleb's thief abilities are better than the average quevari. If possible, he uses these abilities to strike with surprise. One of Caleb's favorite tactics is to lead a band of quevari in a series of hit-and-run attacks on their victims; these strikes slowly weaken their quarry.

Caleb has the innate ability to *charm person* once a day as per the wizard spell. He must be able to speak in order to exercise this power.

Caleb has an old, plain dinner bell in the shape of a triangle. The bell functions as a *Chime of Hunger* (see the *DUNGEON MASTER Guide*). Caleb and all other Waywarders are immune to its effects. He may use the bell in this manner three times a day. He also can use the bell to summon 2d6 quevari to do his bidding. They arrive at his side in 1d2+1 rounds.

Adventures in Wayward

The key to the effective use of Wayward, as with many other RAVENLOFT institutions, is to spring it on the players without warning. Under no circumstances should the players expect a game set in Wayward to possess any supernatural or RAVENLOFT-type elements. Moreover, players should not even realize that the town of Wayward and its inhabitants are the focus of a given gaming session, until the players are in the midst of the scenario. The Dungeon Master should establish the existence of the town in his campaign setting, but downplay its importance. The heroes should always have something more immediate and important than Wayward to concern themselves with.

Wayward is a good setting for a game involving relatively low-level characters (approximately 3rd level), who already have had some experience in the Dungeon Master's campaign. The town of Wayward easily can be inserted into the history of any campaign setting that includes a sparsely populated desert on its map. As the heroes adventure near the desert, they should hear of Wayward's evil reputation. Since the town is so isolated, no news from Wayward ever reaches more cosmopolitan ears. In fact, no one is precisely sure where the settlement is located anymore. Travelers through the desert cannot locate Wayward any longer; some folks attribute the disappearance to poor map-making, while others suggest that the town was wiped out by some sort of natural disaster. No one cares enough to conduct a thorough search for either the town or its citizens.

Occasionally, a traveler passes through the desert near the former site of Wayward and reports strange heat mirages and other bizarre goings-on in the area. Perhaps a priest or missionary once went out to Wayward, never to return home. Folks say that the clergyman was swept up in a cyclone.

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The Dungeon Master can lead the heroes to Wayward by putting them in pursuit of some minor, expendable, villainous NPC. The villain flees into the desert and the party tracks him to Wayward. When the fugitive runs onto the Bone Sands, Wayward should be far from the players' minds. When the town appears on the horizon, the party should be more intent on capturing their quarry than on investigating a dusty little village. To put the players off their guard, the Dungeon Master should tell them that their characters are aware only of a particularly distorted heat mirage as the party approaches the lonely town in the distance; the party does not pass through the Mists of Ravenloft on its way into the domain.

The Dungeon Master should arrange for the heroes to enter Wayward in the early morning so they can have the entire day for investigations. The Waywarders report that the fugitive NPC recently passed through the town, but that he must be gone by now. The closed borders of the domain (see above) prevent the party from following the NPC's supposed trail. In truth, the NPC has already been killed and devoured by the citizenry; his head still adorns a countertop in the mess hall.

The heroes should notice that the Waywarders are an odd lot. The town's official cover story is that the ruined gnomish shantytown is all that remains of a group of refugees who took sanctuary in Wayward, but eventually moved on to start a new settlement. The citizens have effectively repressed their knowledge of the truth, just as they have blocked out their daytime memories of the bloodmoon. However, if their story is questioned in any way, their selective amnesia begins to falter. For example, the heroes may explore the shanty quarter if the players think that the fugitive NPC still is hiding out in the town (the shanties would be a good place for him to lay low). If the Waywarders are asked about the destruction of the shacks, they begrudgingly admit that there was trouble between the gnomes and the humans. Nevertheless, the townspeople still maintain that the hovels were destroyed by accident after the gnomes left town. But then, if the gnomes had moved away, why are their personal possessions among the rubble?

If pressured, someone might admit that the gnomes left town because there was not enough food to go around. The topic of famine may also come up if the heroes ask why the saloon has the unusually pessimistic name of the Lean Times.

If the heroes inquire about the abandoned church, the townspeople sheepishly confess that they have lost their religion. However, they struggle to explain why this has happened. They make lame references to recent hardships that have made them question whether any divine agent is truly watching over their town with a friendly spirit. The former preacher, Adrian Hood, makes some curious comments about life under the desert sun

being too difficult for the Waywarders to endure. Hood says that the citizens failed to be true to the saint of the sun and turned instead to the cool, emboldening strength of the moon. The moon pardons indiscretions more readily than the unforgiving light of the sun, which burns sinners alive.

The subject of Caleb Wicks could be raised if the heroes notice that Caleb is the only child in town. The party could encounter the lord as he runs messages around Wayward. A townspeople might let slip that Caleb is "as bright as a star" and say that the boy "always knows what's best". If asked about this comment, the NPC become very nervous and admits that Caleb made some suggestions about what to do when the trouble with the gnomes started up. Such words could come from Mayor Loomis, who will seek the heroes out to welcome them to Wayward. If questioned, the mayor seems to be hiding a guilty conscience and defers responsibility for the outcome of the Lean Times either to Caleb or else to the townspeople in general.

The heroes could learn of Caleb's aversion to Black Hat from Mistress Chatty. Black Hat's name could easily be introduced into conversation if any of the heroes are wearing a black hat, a black cloak, or shiny black boots, or if any of them are carrying two swords. Chatty (or another citizen) warns the heroes that such gear makes Caleb very uncomfortable.

An attractive local with romantic intentions might invite a hero to his or her home for dinner (just as the sun is beginning to set, of course). If the hero mentions the foul taste of the food, the host says something about "not everything" in Wayward tasting so awful. If asked about this remark, the NPC becomes powerfully agitated.

In these and many other readily apparent ways, the players may realize the true history of Wayward. By the time that they make this discovery, it should be the right moment for the sun to set and the terror to rise as the previously docile, friendly townspeople transform into ferocious, stealthy lunatics. What follows is one long night in which the heroes must fight a running battle with the entire town. The Waywarders make good use of their thief abilities to ambush the party whenever the heroes seem to have gained a momentary respite.

At this point, there are only two ways out of town. If the heroes survive until sunrise, Caleb will always allow the borders to open and the party may exit the domain—either returning to their homeland, or else wandering into another domain of Ravenloft, at the Dungeon Master's option. Otherwise, the party can escape by destroying Caleb Wicks. Reducing Caleb to 0 hit points causes the heroes to be shunted back to the spot at which they entered Ravenloft.

Fighting the Quevari

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The Dungeon Master is encouraged to make combat with the Waywarders as colorful as possible. Although all of the citizens have similar abilities (as described in the *RAVENLOFT MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendices I & II* entry on quevari), the Dungeon Master should establish individual differences between the crazed townspeople. Caleb Wicks' peculiarities have been related above. Examples of other unusual NPCs appear below:

Sheriff Silas Loomis, male quevari, F2: AC 2 (chain mail); MV 12; hp 18; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8+1 or 2d4+1 (bastard sword); SZ M (5'10"); ML average (10) or fanatic (18); Str 16 Dex 11 or 17 Con 15 Int 15 Wis 13 Cha 13 ; AL LG or CE.

Personality: honest and no-nonsense

The sheriff has a bastard sword and an old suit of chain mail, both of which belonged to his father. Because he occasionally practices with the bastard sword, he receives the +2 bonus on his attack roll that all quevari have when using familiar weapons.

Joh Kindle, male quevari: AC 7 (Dex bonus); MV 12; HD 1; hp 8; THAC0 17; #AT 2; Dmg 1d3+1/1d3+1 (hook); SZ M (5'7"); ML unsteady (5) or fanatic (18); Str 8 Dex 9 or 17 Con 8 Int 10 Wis 11 Cha 6; AL N or CE.

Personality: jittery and bawdy

Joh is the degenerate town bum who often ends up in Wayward's one-cell jail while sleeping off a night of hard drinking. Joh's right hand is missing and it has been replaced with a hook. He can attack twice each round with the wicked hook.

Cornado Black, male quevari, F2: AC 6 (leather apron & metal helmet); MV 12; hp 12; THAC0 16; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4+3 (hammer); SZ M (6'3"); ML average (10) or fanatic (18); Str 18 Dex 13 Con 16 Int 11 Wis 16 Cha 10; AL CG or CE.

Personality: gruff and imposing

Cornado is the town's blacksmith. He is extremely strong and hardy. The thick leather apron and metal helmet that he wears while laboring in the smith give him a +1 bonus to his Armor Class.

✘

SERADAN

Where Possession is Nine-Tenths of the Law

by Les Mozingo

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THE LAND

This pocket domain is not much more than a town and the outlying hills. In the distance, one can see the fog-shrouded peaks of mountains, but the Mists shroud the passes just inside the foothills. It is a temperate domain, with light forests to the south and east, and a lake to the north. The temperature rarely climbs above 70 degrees Fahrenheit, and the sky is for the most part overcast. Instead of rains, the domain is constantly covered in a light mist or a drizzling rain. The spirit of Geren Horstadt, a haunt, rules the domain. The people of the town (which has no name) wear drab, lifeless colors in their clothing, and go through their daily routines listlessly, for all the world like animated corpses. Their houses are drab gray stone, with little decoration or variation in layout.

Cultural Level

Chivalric.

The Folk

The people of Seradan are automatons, living without feelings or opinions. Anyone with a Charisma of 13 or higher draws the entire town's attention as a candle flame draws moths. The people will follow any suggestion made by these charming strangers without much thought or care, acting as if hypnotized. The people of Seradan have very few distinguishing features, possessing average-length mousy brown hair and dark brown eyes. The men are all nearly five and a half feet tall, and the women are usually five foot three. At first glance, it seems as though the people of Seradan are in a daze, simply mimicking their old daily lives. They do, however, have some sense of self-preservation, and can react accordingly to threats or community problems. The town's alignment is neutral.

Native Player Characters

If there are player characters from Seradan, expect them to be infuriatingly dull. They will be as noncommittal as possible and the most common (90%) alignment will be neutral. Seradanian characters receive a +1 bonus to fear and horror checks, but a -1 penalty to madness checks. They are exposed to very little in the town; however, the extremely dull nature of their lives drives most of them to the brink of insanity at an early age.

Personalities of Note

Only two people stand out from the norm in Seradan, and they both followed Geren here through the Mists. One of them is Wilhelm Braugh, the inspector who was in charge of investigating Geren and his mother. He is the one who dragged Geren from his chair to the waiting arms of the townspeople. And while he did struggle to maintain his grip on the evil cripple's body, he did not put up too much of a fight. He tried to hide in his cellar when the town burned, and awoke not underneath the flaming beams of his home, but in the forest he now resides in, smelling of smoke. He now spends his time in the forests, hunting and trying to find his way home.

The other personality of note is Rom, a thug who arranged the deaths of Geren's family in the hopes of receiving the huge rewards Geren promised him. When Geren began to spin even wilder tales of power and magic and demons, Rom simply backed away from the deal, until one evening when he stumbled across a wealthy stranger being murdered. Rom hid to watch, hoping to blackmail the killer for a part of the take. He followed the killer to an old barn, then struck up a conversation with him. To his shock, the killer talked using the same verbal manner as his ex-business partner, Geren. Rom cut the conversation short, making sure that the strange man didn't suspect him of having seen anything before he turned to leave. He then began to fear the sick little man in the upstairs window, and it was he who began the most vicious rumors about the Horstadts, in the hopes of one day being able to get someone to help him loot the place.

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Maybe then he would come across his payment. On the evening of the fires, it was he who cast the first torch at Geren's feet—from a safe distance in the crowd. He managed to flee the fires, only to find himself lost in a fog bank. Tired from his running, he lay down in a field to sleep, and awoke in Seradan. He now spends his time running in fear, since the moment he noticed the dull strangers he found himself surrounded by others wearing a familiar scowl.

The Law

The citizens of Seradan as a general rule have no laws, but simply go about their daily business. If someone else poses too much of a problem, they band together to force the offender away, like a colony of ants.

Encounters

Typical encounters in the domain of Seradan are of the wilderness variety, or if inside the town, with the townspeople. There is a 10% chance per day the heroes spend in Seradan that they will encounter a possessed person. Primary indications will be a scornful reaction from what is an ordinarily docile person, as Geren is extremely cynical and bitter about his existence.

Lord of Seradan Geren Horstadt

Haunt, Chaotic Evil

Armor Class	-5/ As host	Str	19 *
Movement	24/ As host	Dex	N/A
Level/Hit Dice	10/ As host	Con	N/A
Hit Points	75/ As host	Int	16
THAC0	10/ As host	Wis	15
No. of Attacks	2/ As host	Cha	7
Damage/Attack	Dexterity drain or by weapon		
Special Attacks	Possession, telekinesis		
Special Defenses	Hit only by +2 weapons, or spells		
Magic Resistance	45%		

* Telekinesis.

Geren is a special version of haunt, empowered by the dark powers. While he is the lord of his domain, the townspeople do not recognize his existence; most possessions are dismissed as fever dreams. The entire domain is his anchor, and as such, he cannot be turned by any means. When found outside of a body Geren typically takes the form of a ball of blue light. He does occasionally wear the image of his former living self, although he hates it for reasons stated below.

Background

Geren was the favored son of a minor noble family on a distant Prime Material world. His parents lavished affection and gifts on him, and he had his every desire filled within moments. He eventually grew to be a bully and a braggart when alone with others, but in the public eye he was seen as the perfect person. All that changed for him at the age of seventeen, when he was struck down by a strange wasting illness that left him unable to use his legs, and cost him a good part of his five senses. His parents did everything they could to cure the disease, but it ran its violent course through his body, leaving him crippled, unable to even lift himself from a chair for more than a scant few seconds. His family soon fell into debt as they pooled every resource they could to try and return their favored son to health.

Fifteen years passed, each one a torment to the crippled Geren. He spent his days in a chair that his family purchased and placed in front of his upper story bedroom window. Geren hated sitting in his chair and watching the normal happy people going about their daily lives, but he could no more resist the urge to stare at them as they passed below his window in the street, than a man could go a month without water. His parents and his three siblings (along with their own families) tried their best to be cheerful and pleasant to their ill relative, but the kindness grew sour to Geren, and he began to perceive their kindness as a mockery and a sham.

Then his family made the mistake that would cost the lives of everyone in town. One of Geren's brothers brought down a trunk full of books from the attic for Geren to peruse. The aged trunk contained not just mundane works, but also several tomes that dealt in the dark arts, especially those that deal with the beings of the Lower Planes. Geren eventually discovered the arcane texts and was initially horrified to learn that one of his great grandfathers had been a mage of great power until he had disappeared from common memory. Geren argued with his father for hours as to whether or not the family could afford to purchase another mage's services, this time as a mentor. After coming out the loser in several such verbal battles, Geren determined that he would summon a fiend himself. After weeks of intense studying, he managed to summon a yugoloth; it nearly destroyed him on the spot. But the venomous manner in which Geren pleaded his case gave the yugoloth pause. He stated that as an invalid, he had no life, needed no soul, and to kill him now and consign him to eternal torment would only change his scenery. Sensing an opportunity, the yugoloth agreed to "help" Geren "feel what others feel", but the price would be the souls of his entire family, since it was obvious that Geren's was already well on the way to damnation. Geren agreed, imagining his entire family downstairs, sneering at the

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sickly man that they had to nurse. His final bargain was that he would be allowed to keep his mother on as his provider until he could find someone else more capable.

Geren's family died in a series of horrible accidents soon after, created by a man Geren hired (under pretenses of newly acquired wealth) to orchestrate his end of the bargain. His mother, still grieving, began to devote all of her time to the one remaining family member she still had. Geren found to his horror that even after the last of his nephews died, he was still confined to his crippled body. It was then in a dream that he discovered his ability to hitchhike in other people's minds, if he thought about it long and hard enough. He was able to feel everything they felt, from joy to sorrow to pain. He was even able to see, smell, and hear properly through these unwitting people. He began to live vicariously through their lives, but in the end he found the experiences wanting. After every session of riding in the back of someone's mind, he was returned to his own crippled body. This forcibly reminded him that he was still simply being carried about, in roughly the same manner as his family used to carry him to the bathtub. He had no control over what he experienced.

By exerting even more willpower, Geren finally found himself able to control the bodies of others. After returning from one such jaunt, he overheard tax collectors harassing his widowed mother downstairs. He realized that with his family gone, it was up to him to replace the squandering money that his family had once enjoyed. He began to use others to steal and kill for money, which he stored in an old barn at the end of town. Eventually, as he grew more careless with his crimes, the townsfolk began to investigate. More rumors began to circulate about Geren, the cripple in the window of the old Horstadt estate. The townsfolk were eventually able to track the complicated routes Geren ran the money through to get it to his home, and the began to question his mother at length, thinking Geren's mind as addled as his body. Her curiosity aroused, she went upstairs to question her only living relative. As she shook Geren awake, he became vexed with her, and simply stared at her with a look of petulant anger. To her horror, she felt something rip into her mind and take control of her body. The last thing she saw was her own hand smashing a vase and raising the jagged shards up to her own throat.

The townsfolk, many of them plagued by dreamlike memories of the things they had done while Geren was in control of their bodies, had begun to develop a fierce loathing of the Horstadt estate. After hearing fresh rumors about its two remaining tenants, the authorities decided to return with more questions for the widow Horstadt. They came in time to hear Geren's mother awaken him from one of his frequently occurring trances, and then there was the sound of something breaking and a heavy thump as something large fell to the floor. Fearing

the worst, the men present broke down the front door and raced up the stairs to Geren's bedroom as watchers in the streets raised a cry of alarm.

They found Geren's mother lying face down in a rapidly spreading pool of her own blood, one of her pale hands tangled in the blankets Geren wore over his legs to fight off the chill. Geren's look of utter guilt and horror at being discovered was all it took to set the inspectors on him with their clubs. They dragged his crippled body out into the streets, where the crowds tore him from the grasp of the inspectors. They ripped and tore at Geren, taking out all of their pent-up fears on his wasted flesh. He was so weak he couldn't even scream his pain as they crudely hung him from a lamppost and beat him to death as he slowly choked. His last sight was of a hundred leering faces, and of torches being set to his family's home as the townsfolk piled wood beneath his swinging feet.

Instead of passing away that night, Geren's need for vengeance was so great that he became a haunt. He possessed one of the drunken stragglers who still stood in the winter chill, daring to spit at his smoldering remains. He grabbed up one of the flaming brands from his own pyre and ran to the farthest end of town. There he set up piles of burning crates to block the streets. As more and more people came out to investigate, he found himself forced to possess more and more of them, since their bodies couldn't handle the work he forced them to do. Within the space of a few hours, he had put most of the town to the torch. Geren then possessed the body of an aging warrior, dragging the man away from rescuing his family to hunt down the people who were still attempting to escape. After the last person had been slain by the warrior's sword, Geren stood in the middle of the street, howling with another man's voice, while he forced the warrior to stand in the flames and perish. The Mists crept in quietly through the smoke to claim Geren, and the domain of Seradan was formed.

Current Sketch

Geren spent years living through the lives of others, and now he dwells in a domain where the people are dull and unimaginative, and almost totally without feeling. He has found to his dismay that whenever he possesses a body, it begins to burn with the same fever that took his strength in his mortal life. Most of Geren's initial time in Seradan was spent trying to explore the strange new land in which he found himself, and then he dedicated his attention to escaping the confines of his new prison. He has recently discovered that the inspector that hauled him bodily from his chair that fateful night came with him through the Mists. This has caused him to forget his desires to escape, as the need for revenge burns bright within him once more. He hopes to crush this man, and to find someone well connected enough to get him the means to

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summon another fiend, so that he might find the answers to his latest questions.

Combat

Geren has all the abilities of a normal haunt, except that he can only be harmed by magical weapons of +1 or better enchantment, or by spells that penetrate his magic resistance. He can now use telekinesis to move objects when in his bodiless form, granting him the comparative strength of a hill giant (19 Strength), but he prefers to attack with his spectral touch, draining 4 points of Dexterity with each successful attack.

When Geren possess a body, that body begins to break down. The host body loses 1 point of Constitution every other round; when the host's Constitution reaches 0 the body dies and Geren is ejected. Geren's victims recover 1 point of Constitution for every 8 hours of complete bed rest.

Geren can also push a host body beyond its normal limits, forcing it into a berserk frenzy in combat, adding +2 to hit and +4 to damage rolls. This frenzy worsens the AC of the victim by 2, and causes the breakdown to occur at the rate of 1 point of Constitution per round.

If destroyed, Geren will reform in one week's time, until he has gotten his final revenge and is satisfied that he could live no fuller life.

Closing the Borders

Geren can only close the borders while outside of a host body. When he does, anyone coming too close to the edge of the domain will lose feeling in their extremities. Those who persist on entering the Misty Border collapse to the ground, unable to move. The closed border saps 2d10 points of Strength each round. A successful save vs. spell can reduce this loss to 1d10 points per round. Geren will usually collect the helpless characters soon after. Once moved away from the border, lost points of Strength return at the rate of one per round.



HÆMOGOBLIN

Ghoulies and Goblins

by Timothy S. Brannan
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HÆMOGOBLIN

Climate/Terrain	Any
Frequency	Very Rare
Organization	Solitary
Activity Cycle	Night
Diet	Living beings
Intelligence	Low (5)
Treasure	Nil
Alignment	Chaotic Evil
No. Appearing	1 (1-4)
Armor Class	6
Movement	12
Hit Dice	4+4
THAC0	16
No. of Attacks	3 (claw/claw/bite)
Damage/Attack	1-8/1-8/1-10
Special Attacks	Blood drain
Special Defenses	Can only be hit by silver or magic
Magic Resistance	Nil
Size	S (3' to 4')
Morale	Steady (11-12)
XP Value	800

Arguably, the highest level of undeath a human may obtain is the vampire. Its ability to blend in with human or demihuman society is as much an asset to it as its great strength and magic.

However, many humanoid races are not suitable for vampiric conversion. Some sages claim that their willpower or life force is relatively low. Other claim it is the gods that control the spirits of these humanoids that do not allow them to become vampires. It could be that vampires find these humanoids distasteful. However, some humanoids have become undead. Undead gnolls (shoovusa) and trolls (spectral and spirit trolls) have been recorded. The Hæmogoblin is also such a creature.

Hæmogoblins are created by vampires in need of specialized servants. Creating a hæmogoblin is similar to creating any other type of vampire; blood is exchanged between the vampire and the victim. However, to create the hæmogoblin the vampire needs to use a somewhat

different technique. The vampire uses any humanoid creature, such as orcs, kobolds, goblins, hobgoblins, or norkers. Usually goblins are chosen, due to their size and manageability. Creatures as large as ogres might be used, but none have ever been reported. Also, goblins cannot be used; they have already been subjected to powerful sorcery.

First, the vampire master takes the humanoid victim and drains it of most of its blood. The vampire then regurgitates the victim's blood back into its mouth. The victim swallows the blood, and its transformation to undeath has begun. Usually by the next night the victim reawakens to full hæmogoblin status. From this point, the hæmogoblin acts as a servant, somewhere between a homunculus/familiar and a vampiric slave. The vampire lord can create a number of these creatures equal to one-fourth of its own hit dice (for example, a 12 Hit Die vampire can create three (12 HD/4) of these creatures.

Combat

Hæmogoblins attack with a claw/claw/bite routine. On any natural 20 rolled for the bite attack, the hæmogoblin will begin to drain the victim's blood at the rate of 1 Con point per round. The hæmogoblin can only be removed with a successful Bend Bars/Lift Gates roll. The victim may not attack during the rounds an attempt to remove the hæmogoblin takes place. If the hæmogoblins are size Small or smaller then two may drain one victim at the same time. If the victim reaches 0 Con points then it dies. Unless a *bless* or *remove curse* spell is cast on the corpse, it will rise the next night as a ghastr.

Hæmogoblins are turned as Ghasts. Hæmogoblins cannot pass on their curse of undeath like the vampire to create other hæmogoblins. However, there is a 50% chance that any humanoid killed by a hæmogoblin will become a ghoul, with 5% of those becoming ghasts. These victims are free-willed, but they are at a disadvantage when encountering the vampire that created the hæmogoblin. They make their saves at a -5 penalty and are 25% more likely to fall under that vampire's control.

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Like all undead, hæmogoblins are affected by holy water, taking 2-8 points of damage per vial. Hæmogoblins also take 10 points of damage for every round they are exposed to bright, full sunlight. A *continual light* spell will cause 1d4 points of damage. They are unaffected by any mind-affecting spells (*charm*, *hold*, *ESP*) or by *sleep*. Hæmogoblins have infravision to 90'.

Habitat/Society

Hæmogoblins are created undead; none will occur “naturally.” They can be most often found in or near the lairs of vampires. Crypts are a very common place to find hæmogoblins. They have been known to associate with ghouls for increased protection and hunting. Hæmogoblins prefer to eat living humans and humanoids. Often, however, they are forced to eat the scraps left to them by their vampire masters. If hard-pressed, hæmogoblins will eat corpses.

Most hæmogoblins encountered will be in the service of a vampire lord. They are often used as spies for the vampire. In one recorded incident, a vampire set up one of his own hæmogoblins as a scapegoat to cover his own tracks. While an angry mob was dealing with the hæmogoblin, the vampire left the area.

Unlike with a true familiar, when a hæmogoblin is destroyed the vampire suffers no ill effects.

Ecology

Hæmogoblins are undead and produce nothing. While the corpses of hæmogoblins may be useful to necromancers or sages, they produce nothing else of value.



BLEEDING WILLOW

Blood is Thicker than Sap

by Charles Brown
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BLEEDING WILLOW

Climate/Terrain	Temperate to Sub-tropical
Frequency	Very Rare
Organization	Solitary
Activity Cycle	Any
Diet	Water, sunlight, and carrion
Intelligence	Animal
Treasure	Special
Alignment	Neutral (Evil)
No. Appearing	1
Armor Class	4 (Trunk), 8 (Tentacle leaves)
Movement	Nil (see below)
Hit Dice	6-16 (2d6+4)
THAC0	6HD: 15 7-8HD: 13 9-10HD: 11 11-12HD: 9 13-14HD: 7 15+HD: 5
No. of Attacks	Up to 5
Damage/Attack	1 each
Special Attacks	Constriction, Binding, Rage
Special Defenses	See Below
Magic Resistance	Nil
Size	H (15'-20' tall)
Morale	Fearless (19-20)
XP Value	2,000 at 6 HD, +1,000 per additional HD

A bleeding willow is believed to be the result of an act of great evil occurring at the base of a young willow tree. Except for a strange reddish coloring to the bark, they are indistinguishable from typical weeping willow trees, unless cut. Then they ooze a red, blood-like sap, completely unlike the sap of most trees. In fact, this sap looks, smells—and, according to some—even tastes identical to human blood.

Combat

In combat, a bleeding willow will attempt to grasp one or more targets with its long, tentacle-like leaves, pin them and then crush them. A bleeding willow can make up to five attacks per round, and may split these between two opponents as desired.

Each successful attack inflicts 1 point of damage, and entangles one limb of the target (determine randomly). Once two or more limbs have been entangled, the leaves begin crushing the target, inflicting 1d4 damage per round, plus one point per leaf holding the target. Leaves are immune to bludgeoning attacks, but take normal damage from edged weapons; they have an effective 18/50 Strength for purposes of breaking their grip. Leaves have 8 hp each.

Bleeding willows would not normally be a serious threat to an adventuring party, except that they have one more special ability, one that makes an encounter with these living trees nightmarish. All of the suffering and evil the trees have witnessed can be unleashed at once as a devastating mental attack, whenever an act of violence occurs within the range listed. The range of this attack is a 10' radius for every 10 years the tree has grown (see Ecology, below). All in this area whose minds are not otherwise shielded (ring of mind shielding, *mind blank* spell, or psionic defenses) must save vs. breath weapon or fall into a mindless, berserker fury, striking savagely at anything that moves in the area. Anyone affected by this mindless rage will seek to launch their most effective physical attack (they are too angry to cast spells or use complex items, though items that have a simple command word or innate powers can be used). Every round in which a character attacks a friend that character can attempt another saving throw; there is a penalty to this roll, however, equal to any damage the character has taken this round. Even victims in the branches of the tree are affected by this berserker rage (though the tree's own attacks do not trigger this ability; it is only externally generated violence that causes the tree to make its special attack).

The psychic assault is triggered automatically by an act of violence occurring near the tree; a bleeding willow

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may make this attack a number of times per day equal to half of its Hit Dice (3 to 8 times per day).

The trees take normal damage from slashing weapons, but piercing and bludgeoning weapons always inflict minimum damage on them. They do not have any other special immunities or vulnerabilities.

Habitat/Society

These trees are solitary creatures, living for up to 160 years. They are ordinary willow trees for the first sixty years of their existence.

They are capable of movement, but they can only move a few feet a day at most—and rarely do so, usually only if the food supply is running low or another plant is crowding out their sunlight, so the movement rate is given as Nil.

The trees gain one Hit Die for every decade of growth.

Though bleeding willows do not gather treasure as such, their victims may have had treasures. There is a 25% chance for the tree to have any type of treasure from type J through S near its base. Most of the time, this treasure is partially or fully buried.

Ecology

Bleeding willows are believed to be innocent trees corrupted by the presence of great evil (essentially anyone failing a powers check near such a tree may turn it into one of these horrors). They are often found along lonely riverbanks, their fronds hanging low to the ground. Often a sound of weeping can be heard in the area of the trees; occasionally this is actually a ghost, created by the same event that triggered the tree's existence. Bleeding willows seem to feed on both the carrion produced by their own actions and their special attack, and violent emotions as well. They are also capable of feeding as normal plants do, and will die if deprived of water or sunlight.



A DARKLING BY ANY OTHER NAME

Differing Darklings Inspired by Van Richten's Guide to the Vistani

by Luis de Pippo
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INTRODUCTION

Since the release of *Van Richten's Guide to the Vistani*, the darkling entry in the *RAVENLOFT MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendices I & II* has been rendered obsolete. Since of the *tasques* and tribes of the Vistani have different attributes, it would seem that the darklings that come from each tribe should also have different abilities. Each entry includes the modifications to be made to the darkling's *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM* entry.

Some abilities remain common to all darklings:

- ❖ Darklings retain the ability to *pass without trace*.
- ❖ A darkling will retain the ability to use and understand the *paaterna* (the Vistani language).
- ❖ They are able to find and interpret *tralaks* (Vistani runic symbols) and will remember any old *paaterns* (the symbolic "secret" written language used for Vistani messages) that they knew before being expelled. However, darklings can only learn new *paaterns* from Vistani still active within the tribes, or a more recently exiled darkling.
- ❖ Darklings also retain the Vistani tracking ability.
- ❖ Being naturally stealthy, Darklings impose a -2 penalty on all opponents' surprise rolls.
- ❖ All Vistani, darkling or not, can identify plants, animals and pure water as if they were druids.
- ❖ *Manusa* darklings have the ability of foresight; all other darklings lose this ability.
- ❖ The "standard" darkling is considered to be a 2nd-level thief with all the appropriate abilities and penalties of that class.

Darklings also act under a few common restrictions:

- ❖ They are unable to leave the Mist-bound region in which their expulsion from the tribe took place (be it an Island of Terror, a Cluster, or the Core).
- ❖ They suffer from moon madness during the time of full moon, as with *mortu Vistana*. They must roll a madness check each night of the full moon or suffer insanity for those three days.
- ❖ Unless otherwise noted, all darklings lose the use of their herbalism proficiency.

Kaldresh Darklings

According to Van Richten, the Kaldresh *tasque* are the "camp followers" of the Vistani. The different tribes inside this *tasque* provide different services, often for armed forces on the march.

Kamii

The Kamii tribe specializes in forging weapons and creating other items of quality, often for enchantment. Kamii darklings retain their skills as smiths and artisans, but items they create can only hold curses, not other enchantments. They lose the ability to create items of quality as described for the Kamii, but they can create inferior items as detailed in the *Guide*. They may also make items with "embarrassing" or weaker curses, given time and a suitable forge. Kamii darklings seldom create items because it reminds them of their former lives. Darklings of this tribe can invoke a special form of the evil eye once per day. This causes all the weapons of the afflicted person to work as if they are -1 weapons (even those with enchantments) for 24 hours.

Modifications: XP 270

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Equaar

Vistani of the Equaar tribe are expert animal handlers and breeders. All Equaar darklings retain their *animal friendship* power but can only use it once per day, unless using it on horses; these they can affect three times per day. They also retain the tribal ability to track with a +2 bonus, but they lose their limited object reading ability. Once per year, an Equaar darkling can carve a limited version of the “Ebony Fly” *Figurine of Wondrous Power*. This figurine will only function on the three nights of the new moon. Equaar darklings can use the evil eye to make animals react to the victim with hatred. This lasts for one day, and causes all animals that do not possess a special bond to the victim to be hostile towards him or her. Familiars are immune to this effect, and the animal followers of rangers or druids may make a saving throw vs. spell to resist.

Modifications: None

Vatraska

The Vatraska tribe acts as the priests and healers of the Vistani. All Vatraska darklings retain their herbalism proficiency but now are motivated by anger, and often use their skill to identify and create poisons. They can no longer use their powers to heal, but they certainly can cause harm. Although they are masters of poisons, and can brew any poison listed in the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide*, they can no longer concoct the special poisons other Vatraska can make as listed in *Van Richten's Guide to the Vistani*. They can invoke the evil eye once per day, causing all wounds the victim received that day to reopen and bleed again. In game terms a character subjected to this power who was wounded that day again takes the same amount of damage he originally suffered.

Modifications: None

Boem Darklings

The Boem are the entertainers and thieves of the Vistani. They run most of the scams that the Vistani are accused of. All Boem darklings lose the *charm person* ability common to their tasque. They can, however, *cause fear* at will. Most darklings encountered will be from one of the Boem tasques.

Naiat

The Naiats are the tribe that specializes in providing entertainment to the masses. They appear almost as a carnival or troupe of actors. All Naiat Vistani can influence reactions as a bard of their level or hit dice while playing a violin, but Naiat darklings can only worsen reactions (from friendly to cautious for example). Once per year, they can craft a magical instrument that

duplicates the effects of *Pipes of Pain* or *Deafness*, and these items work only in the three nights of the new moon. They can invoke the evil eye once per day: anyone affected loses both the sense of hearing and of touch for 24 hours.

Modifications: XP 650

Corvara

The Corvara are the thieves of the Vistani. It is for the deeds of this tribe that Vistani are universally hated. All Corvara darklings perform as 5th-level thieves (instead of the 2nd-level ability other darklings possess). Their knowledge of herbs allows them to easily create Type E poisons (Death/20). Once per day a Corvara darkling may invoke the evil eye, even imposing a -2 penalty to the target's saving throw to resist. If the evil eye is successful the target will be automatically surprised in every encounter for the next 24 hours.

Modifications: THAC0 18, XP 1400

Manusa Darklings

The Manusa are the most mysterious of the Vistani. Many consider them the wizards of the Vistani, but this is inaccurate. Encounters with Manusa Vistani—darkling or otherwise—are extremely rare.

Canjar

The Canjar are the true spell-casters of the Manusa. Canjar darklings do not act as thieves, but as “generalist” mages, usually of 2nd level (though they may be as high as 6th level). Upon becoming darklings, they lose their ability to glance ahead in time and know which spell(s) will be needed during the day. Once per year the darkling can use the Zsalev (also known as living night, a magical effect used as a messenger or to drive fear into the hearts of the enemy), but they can not create moon jewelry or evil eye amulets (not even cursed ones). Once per day they can use their evil eye on a spell-casting character (mage, priest, bard or high-level paladin or ranger); if successful, the target loses their ability to remember or cast spells for 24 hours.

Modifications: THAC0 20, XP 650

Zarovan

There are no Zarovan darklings in existence and it is doubtful there will ever be.



TOPIARY GOLEM

Evil Takes a New Shape

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Author's Note: The topiary golem is inspired by the topiary monsters in Stephen King's *The Shining*.

GOLEM, TOPIARY

Climate/Terrain	Topiary Gardens or rarely in Woodlands
Frequency	Very Rare
Organization	Group or Solitary
Activity Cycle	Any
Diet	None
Intelligence	Low (5-7)
Treasure	None
Alignment	Neutral
No. Appearing	1d6
Armor Class	8
Movement	See below
Hit Dice	See below
THAC0	As per HD
No. of Attacks	See below
Damage/Attack	See below
Special Attacks	Poison
Special Defenses	+1 or better to hit, 1/2 damage from blunt weapons, 1/4 damage from slicing, surprise
Magic Resistance	35%
Size	See below
Morale	20
XP Value	Varies

Topiary golems are a rare magical construct found only in Renaissance-cultured domains. They appear as giant animals made of shrubbery, usually dogs, big cats, elephants, or dragons. During the spring and summer months they are light green, which gives them a form of camouflage (+3 bonus to surprise). During the fall and winter, they appear as a brown skeleton of naked branches. This still gives the golem a form of camouflage (+1 to surprise) in woodland settings.

Combat

Topiary golems attack as if they were the animals of their form. Thus dogs would rush up and bite, where lions would stalk their prey. Though each is unique, here are the basic stats of the more common forms:

Type	MV	HD	#Att	Damage	Size
Dog	15	4	1	2d4	L (6' long)
Lion	21	6	3	1d4 x2 / 1d8	L (8' long)
Elephant	14	8	3	2d4 x2 / 3d4+2	L (12' long)
Dragon*	12 fl 24	6	3	1d4+1 x2 / 3d4	L (10' long, thin)

* Note that the Dragon has no breath attack or magic.

Most wizards make their topiary golems out of plants with toxic sap. In these cases, with each successful attack there is a 15% chance that the victim must make a save vs. poison. Topiary golems may carry any kind of poison found in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. Unlike most other RAVENLOFT golems, topiaries are always under the control of their creator (or so their creators hope). If a golem is not trimmed for four weeks, it goes berserk, attempting to kill those who ignored it (usually the creator and master gardener). If it is somehow paralyzed and trimmed, it will return to normal.

Habitat/Society

Topiary golems are used to protect the garden and house of their creator. They can be given any simple orders (up to 15 words long). Most are placed next to where the wizard is growing spell components. The first known topiary golems in Ravenloft were made by an otherwise unknown wizard in Mordent. He used them more to keep superstitious people away than to protect his estate from would-be attackers. It is said that he has long since died and his creations still roam around his lands, killing those who attempt to enter his manor.

Topiary golems are also found on Gothic Earth. Originally encountered in a few sculptured gardens of Renaissance Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, rumors of their resurgence have reached the

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ears of paranormal investigators in the late nineteenth century. They believe several gardens (modeled after the original European Renaissance gardens) on wealthy American industrialists' estates and newly constructed resort hotels may be home to a modern variety of topiary golem in the Victorian Era.

Ecology

A wizard of 15th or greater level can create such a golem. He requires the spells *wish*, *polymorph any object*, and *plant growth* to give his creation "life." It takes four years to grow the plant(s), then three weeks of spellcasting and trimming to form the golem. They do not cost much compared to other golems—only 3,000 gp/HD. If slain, their remains turn to dust which is worthless as spell components.

On Gothic Earth, it is believed that the modern topiary golems created in late nineteenth century America have been so created by adepts using a tome similar to *The Frankenstein Papers* (see the Masque of the Red Death adventure "Jigsaw" by Dan De Fazio and Christina A. Stiles in *DUNGEON Magazine* #61). This tome is rumored to be written in Latin and penned by the original European creators.



LESSER BREEDS OF THE ARAK II

More Fey Races from the Shadow Rift

by Rene Littek

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SECOND EXPEDITION

We had barely returned from our successful expedition to the Shadow Rift last year, where I and my companions discovered the vilay and the huldrow, before we started organizing a second journey to discover other fey races hiding within the Mists. The following are our findings, brought to you, gentle reader, from the depths of the Rift. With this text I and my surviving crew honor our fallen friend Norlo who died in the name of research.

**From the diary of
Pale Uneveneyes, Elven Mage
Sithicus, 753 BC**

... I and my companions first mistook the fanggen for a vilay, an earlier discovery, but our error would soon be corrected ...

FANGGEN

Climate/Terrain	Shadow Rift
Frequency	Very Rare
Organization	Solitary
Activity Cycle	Any (night)
Diet	Carnivore
Intelligence	Exceptional (15-16)
Treasure	Special
Alignment	Chaotic evil (see below)
No. Appearing	1
Armor Class	1
Movement	14
Hit Dice	7+2
THACO	13
No. of Attacks	1
Damage/Attack	1-6
Special Attacks	Level drain
Special Defenses	+1 or better weapon to hit, immune to wood weapons
Magic Resistance	30%
Size	M
Morale	16
XP Value	5,000

Appearance

It is truly difficult to distinguish this creature from its fey cousin the vilay (see "Lesser Breeds of the Arak" in *The Book of Sorrows*), for the fanggen uses illusions to snare people into mistaking her for one of those good-natured tree spirits. Those who see the fanggen's true visage have usually become her victims, for the fanggen cannot maintain her illusions while attacking. The fanggen true form appears as a wrinkled old hag with stringy green-grey hair, a toothless mouth, long twiglike fingers and a constant hunger in her milky white eyes. All fanggen can

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transform into crows at will, often using this form to spy upon people near their trees.

Combat

When she first steps out of her tree, a fanggen appears very attractive, using a short-lived illusion as disguise. This pleasing appearance often allows her to strike with surprise. A fanggen's attack is similar to that of a wraith, her chilling touch simultaneously inflicting 1d6 points of damage and draining one level with a successful attack. If a victim is reduced to 0 levels in this fashion, the fanggen will absorb his or her soul into her tree. The victim's face, frozen in its last scream, will appear on the bark of the gnarled tree within three days. A person lost this way can only be restored with a *wish* spell or through divine intervention, an unlikely event within Ravenloft. If the fanggen is killed before the face appears on the bark, the slain victim can be *resurrected* normally.

Direct sunlight is dangerous to a fanggen; she suffers three points of damage each round she is exposed. Filtered light only reduces the damage by one point. Although fanggen can normally only be harmed by spells or magical weapons of +1 bonus or better, weapons made of copper inflict full damage.

Habitat

Similar to dryads and vilay, fanggen lair within trees. If such a tree is seen without the fanggen's mirages, it appears as a huge, gnarled, oaklike tree, sporting midnight black leaves and bark. The pattern of the bark is twisted into human faces caught in agony. To trick people into believing her tree to be that of a gentle vilay, some fanggen adorn their homes with the skulls of their former victims. These skulls are not made of crystal, however, offering a last indicator that one is not dealing with a vilay. Fanggen normally keep an eye out for travelers, and are thus seldom seen before they cloak themselves in illusion. However, those fanggen observed by concealed witnesses have been seen caressing the faces on their tree, cackling, whispering, and gloating to the terrorized faces of their past victims. Lately a rare few fanggen have also started to use another hunting technique: They hang treasure found on their victims from the branches of their lair, creating virtual "treasure-trees" to lure the greedy. These rumors have already started to circulate amid the fortune hunters of the Core.

Ecology

Fanggen are antisocial by nature; they can't even stand their own kind. Fanggen view new souls with far too covetous an eye to consider sharing their hunting grounds with one of their sisters. Should by chance two fanggen trees sprout in the same area the fey will fight each other

until one is destroyed. Therefore, two fanggen will almost never be encountered in the same place. Fanggen ignore other fey, neither attacking nor even talking to them. Vilay seem not to mind that the fanggen use their reputation to catch prey. After all, they are two branches of the same tree, and it is not the fanggen's fault if mortals cannot separate true beauty from illusion.

In the end, the fanggen is a soul thief, no better than most undead, but she is also a rare example that sometimes good can spring from evil. If a fanggen absorbs a total of 100 levels from good-aligned victims, her tree bursts open and the fanggen is transformed. She awakens the next day as a beautiful woman with light hair and pointed ears, and clad in clothes made of soft brown bark. She remembers all the evil she has done in her past life, but she is now of good alignment and will try to atone for her deeds. The reformed fanggen normally leaves the area of her misdeeds and wanders the land, serving people secretly as a maidservant. This behavior has spawned many tales about guardian spirits called the "Braunchen." Some peasants claim that you must never give clothes to one's servant spirit, because then it will vanish. Therefore many people who think they are visited by a Braunchen, or wish to receive visits from one, place a dish of milk in front of the door.

Reformed fanggen can be used as a player character race. They have the same bonuses, penalties, and requirements as an elf or half-elf, with the following alterations: Because the character is still of Arak blood she is virtually immortal; she does not age, and is immune to aging attacks. However, she also retains her vulnerability to sunlight, detailed above. Most of the time a fanggen heroine will choose the mage or bard class. The redeemed kit from *Champions of the Mists* would be very appropriate for this heroine. Lastly, should a fanggen character even fail a madness check, she almost certainly develops a split personality, formed by emerging fragments of her former victims' souls.

Fanggenkin

There appear to be no fanggenkin, because fanggen kill every human or demihuman that comes near their tree. There is one exception to this rule, however. The fanggen who use the "treasure tree" tactic to lure victims sometimes allow people to escape to spread the rumor of her lair, making them her unwitting agents.

... I do not believe that I have ever seen anything so beautiful as she. Perhaps I shall never see beauty like hers again, even though I never saw more than a glimpse of her beauty. . .

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GLASSNYMPHS (FAND)

Climate/Terrain	Shadow Rift
Frequency	Very Rare
Organization	Solitary
Activity Cycle	Any (night)
Diet	Nil
Intelligence	Exceptional (15-16)
Treasure	Varies
Alignment	Neutral good
No. Appearing	1-2
Armor Class	9
Movement	13
Hit Dice	7
THAC0	13
No. of Attacks	1
Damage/Attack	1d4 or special
Special Attacks	Spells
Special Defenses	+1 or better weapon to hit, immune to silver and crystal weapons
Magic Resistance	35%
Size	M
Morale	Steady (12)
XP Value	5,000

Appearance

Glassnymphs, called fand by the fey, are always invisible while in their watery homes. They can only be seen if they emerge from the water, use some sort of body paint, or wrap themselves in shadows. Any of the above options reveals an elfin woman whose looks can kill, literally. Fand can also transform into a swan or crane, and are visible while in these forms.

Combat

Glassnymphs exhibit powers and behavior similar to the standard nymphs in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL*, able to cast *dimension door* once per day, and capable of casting spells as a 7th-level druid. The beauty of a glassnymph in her true form can cause permanent blindness unless the witnesses save vs. spell. The sight of a glassnymph's nude body will strike onlookers dead if their save vs. spell is unsuccessful. Assuming the witness survives the sight of the fand's beauty, she can then *charm* any male onlooker. Targets of this *charm* are allowed a save vs. spell to avoid its effects.

Glassnymphs can be harmed by magical weapons for +1 enchantment or better, or any weapon coated with coal dust. As opposed to most Arak, sunlight poses relatively little threat to glassnymphs, inflicting only 1 point of damage per turn even if the fey is exposed to direct sunlight.

Habitat

The shadowed lakes of the Rift make up the homes of this vain fey race. Every body of water inhabited by one of these creatures sports a haunting, shadow-shrouded beauty, rivaling that of the sun-flooded glades of true nymphs.

Ecology

Fand are quite curious about their neighbors. If a fand hears the sounds of activity she will leave her waters, so long as she deems it safe to do so. After she leaves her lair, she will try to lurk in the shadows, secretly spying on the visitors to her home, hoping they can satisfy the one trait even stronger than her curiosity: her vanity. If a fand considers the visitors to be deserving of her beauty, she reveals her presence. She starts asking her guests not to be afraid, then shows them parts of her body, using her *charm* ability if necessary to guarantee cooperation. After this display, compliments normally flow towards the fand, making her one of happiest beings in creation, for a fand cannot see herself and her vanity relies entirely upon the opinions of others. Other good-aligned fey are usually fond of the glassnymphs, but sometimes find it quite boring to talk endlessly about the beauty of either nature or that of someone they can't even see in their entirety.

Glassnymphkin

A glassnymph selects the beautiful and the kind as her kin, but only rarely does a mortal live up to the standards of a glassnymph. Assuming a fand does find some mortal worthy, a glassnymphkin becomes immune to the killing effect of a glassnymph's beauty. However, as time goes by they also start to vanish, fading from existence. These changelings lose one level each year; when all their levels are drained, they are absorbed into the glassnymph's being, adding their knowledge to her thoughts and memories.

... *The creature already lay on top of my paralyzed body and surely would have been my doom, had my friends not slain the vile thing. I have encountered a satyr before, but I never laid eyes on a more debased creature than his relative from the Rift. Our dwarven companion Norlo dubbed it "Schattenziege," but the fey call its kind the "Sadhuin" . . .*

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SADHUIN (SCHATTENZIEGE)

Climate/Terrain	Shadow Rift
Frequency	Very Rare
Organization	Solitary or group
Activity Cycle	Any (night)
Diet	Carnivore
Intelligence	Very (11-12)
Treasure	S, E
Alignment	Chaotic Evil
No. Appearing	1-4
Armor Class	5
Movement	18
Hit Dice	6+3
THAC0	15
No. of Attacks	1
Damage/Attack	1d4+2 or by weapon
Special Attacks	None
Special Defenses	+1 or better weapon to hit, immune to gold weapons
Magic Resistance	25%
Size	M
Morale	11
XP Value	2,400

Appearance

These “satyrs” of the Shadow Rift are quite unlike their jolly cousins. They resemble some sort of fiendish parody of a satyr and act appropriately, sporting snarling faces with long beards, four horns and hairy goat legs. The ‘flutes’ they wear are used to blow small poisonous darts at their victims. The sadhuin may also take the form of huge rams, sometimes using this form to attack people who wander near the cliffs of the Rift.

Combat

Sadhuin are brutal, sneaky and ruthless. Because they lost their magical *charm* abilities long ago, they now try to disable their opponents with darts they blow through their flutes. All darts are soaked with a very potent poison with effects equal to the *sleep* spell. Once they have drugged all their victims, they will come out of hiding and try to kill or enslave their prey. Ages ago the sadhuin could only be harmed by weapons made of glass, but at some point in their history they earned the wrath of the vilay, who cursed them to be vulnerable to wooden weapons as well. Because of their dark natures sadhuin seem to suffer even worse than other fey if exposed to the rays of the sun. Direct sunlight inflicts 5 points of damage to them each turn (or 1 point every other round); filtered light reduces this damage to 3 points per turn.

Habitat

The sadhuin live in deep caves and in the darkest parts of the Shadow Rift’s forests. Sadhuin lairs may be recognized by their disgusting stench. Paradoxically they decorate their homes with the most expensive treasures that fall into their claws. Others even present themselves as artists, drawing crude pictures on the walls. The blood they use as their paint only adds to the foul odor of the lair. Places inhabited by more than one sadhuin are subject to nightly parties. These feasts consists mostly of wild dances, drinking, and cruel games with captured slaves.

Ecology

Sadhuin serve no purpose in ecology, existing only to rob, kill, and humiliate wherever ever they go. Sadhuin are generally despised by the inhabitants of Ravenloft’s Core domains, for they kidnap women, forcing them into lives of slavery, often ‘accidentally’ killing them while playing or out of sheer boredom. The other fey hate them for their brutal ways, some even thinking them no better than beasts that should have been exterminated long ago, were it not for the Law of Arak. Even the good-aligned fey may secretly look kindly upon heroes who kill one of the sadhuin, in this way releasing them from the temptation of breaking the Law of Arak. The vilay in particular are especially pleased whenever they hear of the demise of a sadhuin. What the sadhuin could have done to earn the lasting hatred of their kind is a mystery. The vilay almost never speak of the sadhuin’s past; if they do the only comment they will offer is that are worse crimes than breaking the Law of Arak. The huldrow also despise the sadhuin nearly as much as the vilay. Somewhere in the past the sadhuin enraged these outcasts as well.

Sadhuinkin

The sadhuin select the worst dregs of humanity for their changelings. Sadhuinkin are drunkards, despoilers, and killers, the scum of humanity. Luckily even they are not safe from the sadhuin’s cruel games, keeping their numbers low. These vile changelings are best avoided or destroyed.



WERESNAKE

Two Shapechanging Serpents for Ravenloft or Gothic Earth

by Daniel Bandera

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WERESNAKE (KING COBRA, ANACONDA)

Climate/Terrain	Warm Humid Lands (India and Southeast Asia / South and Central America)	
Frequency	Very Rare	
Organization	Solitary	
Activity Cycle	Any	
Diet	Carnivore	
Intelligence	High	
Treasure	Nil	
	King Cobra	Anaconda
Alignment	Lawful Evil	Lawful or Neutral Evil
No. Appearing	1	1
Armor Class	4	3
Movement	15, Sw 15	6, Sw 18
Hit Dice	5	7+2
THACO	15	13
No. of Attacks	1	1 or 2
Damage/Attack	1d6 (bite)	1d8 (bite) / 2d6+2 (constriction)
Special Attacks	poison	constriction
Special Defenses	+1 or ivory to hit	+1 or silver or hardwood to hit
Magic Resistance	N/A	N/A
Size	M	M
in snake form	L (12-18')	L (25-30')
Morale	13	12
XP Value	650	1,400

typical king cobra. If threatened the creature flattens out its neck ribs, spreading the hood wide. When preparing to attack, the were-king cobra can rear up to a third of its body length, making it as tall as a man. The snake's rearing height is important, as it bites by attacking forward and down, so it cannot attack anything above that height. The king cobra has half-inch long fangs that inject one of the deadliest poisons in nature, known to have killed elephants in half an hour.

In human form, were-king cobras appear entirely human, and are able to blend into the community around them. A few features stand out about were-king cobras. For one, they lack most body hair; except for the hair growing on their scalp, were-king cobras are hairless. Other noticeable characteristics are their height and weight: Were-king cobras are usually taller than the average human, though not abnormally so. They range in height from 5'11" to 6'4" for males, and 5'8" to 6'2" for females. They are also more slender than humans, never weighting more than 150 lbs. for males or 110 for females.

In the were-king cobra's third or hybrid form, black scales cover the creature's body. Its torso stretches longer and thinner, until the creature stands 8 feet tall. A 3-foot tail grows from the creature's lower back, and its hair disappears under the newly formed scales on its head. As scales cover the were-king cobra's head the vertebra in its neck form a hood, larger but otherwise similar to the one in its snake form. Its tongue becomes forked and doubles in length.

Were-King Cobra

King cobras have three forms: human, snake, and a hybrid between the two. In snake-form they appear as a typical king cobra, covered with black scales fading to a yellowish underbelly. They measure from 12 to 18 feet long, but are never more than a half foot wide. As a normal king cobra, the were-king cobra has a "hood" that extends from around its throat. The back of the hood has the familiar eyespot pattern of a

Combat

Were-king cobras try to avoid direct confrontations, preferring to attack by surprise. When stalking prey were-king cobras move through the undergrowth in silence, approaching to within a few feet of their prey before striking. The utter silence with which the were-king cobra moves imposes a -4 penalty to its opponents' surprise rolls.

The were-king cobra is able to inject a deadly poison into its prey with its half-inch long fangs. A victim of the

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were-king cobra's bite must save vs. poison with a -4 penalty or die in 6+1d4 rounds. If the die roll of a human victim's saving throw indicates failure, but fall within 4 points of the number needed for success, the victim will not die, though he may wish he had. Instead, his body is racked with tremors and pain. The victim soon falls comatose, bedridden with a high fever and chills for a week, but will then mysteriously recover. Unknown to the victim, he has contracted lycanthropy from the bite and will transform into a were-king cobra as described below.

While in snake or hybrid form, hereditary and maledictive were-king cobras can use a mesmerizing dance called the "Dance of the Cobra." All those within 60 feet who watch the snake's hypnotic dance must save vs. paralysis or be *enthralled* (as per the spell) for 1d6 rounds after the dance ends. Some were-king cobras have mastered the dance enough to inflict a -2 penalty to the victim's saving throw.

Only weapons made of ivory or imbued with at least a +1 magical enchantment can harm were-king cobras.

Contrary to popular belief, were-king cobras are not mesmerized by pipe music. However, the sound does make them lethargic. If a were-king cobra hears the pipe music of a snake-charmer for 5 consecutive rounds, it will be affected as if by a *slow* spell. Typically, a hereditary or maledictive were-king cobra will simply flee at the sound of such music, returning at a later time when its prey is unaware.

Habitat/Society

In the Demiplane of Dread, were-king cobras are natives of the domain of Sri Raji. There they live on the outskirts of the two smaller cities of Pakat and Tvashsti. A few live as hermits in the jungle itself, but most prefer to live near the communities of man to feed off livestock and the occasionally human. Most attempt to remain unnoticed by the domain lord, Arijani, and his cult of Kali, whom they fear. Occasionally a were-king cobra will join one of the other evil cults in Sri Raji, such as Shiva, but none have ever joined the Dark Sisters that serve Arijani. Such were-king cobras can advance as priests up to 8th level. A few of those were-king cobras living near the city of Tvashsti have gained access to that city's large university. These creatures have taken up the study of magic and become wizards. Were-king cobras can advance as wizards up to 10th level.

Ecology

An infected were-king cobra transforms for one week following the summer and winter solstice and the spring and fall equinox. During this time the were-king cobra must eat the equivalent of a large human child, though

they can and do eat larger prey. The were-king cobra swallows its prey whole after using its poisonous bite. Once it does so, the infected were-king cobra is typically lethargic for ten days following the meal. The affected were-king cobra acts as if under the affects of a *slow* spell. This lethargy continues even after it returns to its human form.

Hereditary and maledictive were-king cobras also suffer from lethargy after feeding, but they recover after only five days. Such were-king cobras need only feed once per month, though they often eat small meals while in human form to maintain their disguise.

Were-king cobras hunt a variety of prey large and small, including humans. However, for some unknown reason, were-king cobras will not attack cattle for any reason.

Gothic Earth

On Gothic Earth, were-king cobras are solitary, and do not form communities of their own, instead living in small communities in rural India and throughout Indochina. They prefer to live in villages near rivers or bodies of water, but travel to large cities on occasion. Were-king cobra are excellent swimmers and typically hunt their prey near the water's edge. If anything goes wrong in its attack, the were-king cobra uses the water to escape.

Most were-king cobras are Lawful Evil, though 5% of them are Lawful Neutral. Were-king cobras are very ambitious creatures, and typically pose as the holy man in their village in an attempt to exert influence in their communities. The influence they hold varies from one were-king cobra to the next, but all promote a respect for snakes of all kinds. Communities in which were-king cobras live do not fear snakes and often live safely in close proximity to many poisonous snakes. Were-king cobras have no control over normal serpents, however. Another aspect of their status as wise men is they tend to have a strong connection to the past, and many were-king cobras have delved deep into the lost secrets of the ancients to discover adept magic. Such were-king cobras can advance as adepts up to 7th level.

Occasionally, a were-king cobra's ambition brings it to one of the large cities in southeast Asia to conduct some nefarious plot. Though this is rare, it is suspected that at least two were-king cobras have gained mid-level positions in the British colonial government of India.

Were-Anaconda

Were-anacondas have two forms, that of a human and of a gigantic snake. In human form, they are indistinguishable

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from the native inhabitants of South and Central America, with brown skin and dark hair.

In snake form, were-anacondas grow from 25 to 30 feet in length. Their width can be as much as 15 inches. Their coloration varies from one creature to the next, but a broken pattern of shades of blacks and browns are typical. Despite its large size, the appearance of a were-anaconda in snake-form is not abnormal as normal anacondas occasionally grow to the same length. A were-anaconda's eyes have slit pupils in both human and snake form, though this is only slightly noticeable while human.

Combat

Were-anacondas avoid combat unless in snake-form. They attack by dropping on their prey from above, or lashing out vertically at a target. The were-anaconda's natural abilities for stalking prey gives it the equivalent of the Hunting proficiency. The were-anaconda's natural camouflage and stealth grant it a base score of 16 in this skill, and they use this ability to gain surprise on their prey, both animal and human.

Once the were-anaconda strikes its prey, it constricts around the victim's torso, automatically causing construction damage each round. A were-anaconda is long enough to be able to constrict up to two adult humans at one time. Freeing a victim from the snake's constriction requires a combined Strength of 60 points. Anyone attacking a were-anaconda while it constricts a victim has a 20% chance of hitting the victim instead.

Though rarely used, the bite of a were-anaconda can inflict its prey with lycanthropy. For each point of damage inflicted with a bite, there is a 2% chance the victim contracts the disease.

Were-anacondas are only affected by weapons with at least a +1 enchantment, or by those weapons made from silver or the hardwood of the mahogany tree, called *caobo* by the locals. Were-anacondas also have an allergy to guava, and cannot stand the smell. A were-anaconda will not close within 20 feet of a guava tree, and will flee if sprayed with guava juice. The were-anaconda will not return until it has been able to wash off the smell.

Habitat/Society

Hereditary were-anacondas are unknown in the known domains of Ravenloft, but deceitful and malevolent beings of the Demiplane are occasionally cursed to become were-anacondas. Such maledictive lycanthropes can be of any class.

Occasionally a were-anaconda will establish his home near a small village. In this case, the local villagers tend to accept the were-anaconda's presence, since it drives away other large predators that enter its hunting grounds. At the same time the villagers fear the were-

anaconda and may try to placate him with various gifts, including livestock.

As mentioned above, were-anacondas kill or drive off any large predators, including snakes and other were-anacondas, that enter their hunting ground, usually a stretch of river one to two miles in length.

Ecology

Because were-anacondas rarely use their bite in combat, infected Anacondas are very rare. If an individual does become one of the few inflected were-anacondas, he will transform into snake form on the first night of each new moon and remain in that form until the third night of the new moon. During this time the were-anaconda hunts until it has eaten the equivalent of an adult human. As with a normal anaconda, it swallows its prey whole. Once an infected were-anaconda eats its prey, it enters a lethargic period, similar to that described above under the King Cobra. The were-anaconda's lethargy lasts for six days.

Hereditary were-anacondas also suffer from lethargy after feeding, but have developed a way to break out of the lethargy if threatened. Hereditary were-anacondas can regurgitate the prey they have swallowed. This allows them to shake off the effects of lethargy in a single round, so better to defend itself against a threat, or to attack and kill more prey that it does not wish to escape.

Gothic Earth

The were-anacondas of Gothic Earth have no society of their own. The were-anaconda lives a solitary life, away from others of its kind and human settlements. Were-anacondas hate large crowds and will never willingly enter a large town or city. Typically they live as hermits in the rain forests of Central and South America. Because they prefer to hunt in or near water, were-anacondas usually make their homes near the large rivers and flood plains of the rain forests.

Maledictive were-anacondas are more common than one would believe. It seems to be a common curse that affects native mystics of Central and South America who fall under the attention of the Red Death.



VAMPIRIC VIRUS

When Blood Goes Bad

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VIRUS, VAMPIRIC

Climate/Terrain	Ravenloft
Frequency	Very Rare
Organization	N/A
Activity Cycle	Any
Diet	Nil
Intelligence	Non- (0)
Treasure	Nil
Alignment	Neutral
No. Appearing	N/A
Armor Class	N/A
Movement	0
Hit Dice	Special
THAC0	Nil
No. of Attacks	0
Damage/Attack	Nil
Special Attacks	See below
Special Defenses	See below
Magic Resistance	10%
Size	T (Microscopic)
Morale	N/A
XP Value	860

Background

The magical viruses created by the mage Phagius rank among the most insidious and deadly dangers inhabiting the Demiplane of Dread. Few who contract these dread afflictions survive to warn others of their peril, thus breeding horror and ignorance. The vampiric virus seems to trace its origins back to a single “patient,” a nosferatu who was exposed to one of Phagius’ creations. Not only was the undead creature’s necrology able to resist the assault of the magical plague, it caused the disease to mutate into an even more deadly and unnatural scourge.

Transmission

The vampiric virus adheres to the rules for transmission provided in the “Virus” entry of the *RAVENLOFT MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix III*. The virus becomes active

while in the body of a living victim, but immediately falls dormant upon the death of its host. Anyone coming in contact with the blood of a slain host risks infection. Any character exposed to the dormant virus must make a saving throw vs. spell at a -2 penalty. If this save is failed, the character has been infected. If the roll indicates success, the character must then save vs. death magic. If this save is failed, the character has become a carrier (a state described in the *RAVENLOFT MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix III*).

The vampiric virus has also developed an unusual, defensive method of transmission, detailed under Treatment.

Symptoms

The effects of this blight evolve in a slow and subtle manner. Within 24 hours after contraction the infected victim will gain a sanguine, almost ruddy complexion; most victims also experience increased energy and exuberance, gaining a temporary +1 bonus to Constitution, Dexterity, and Strength. At this stage the disease attacks the victim’s plasma, slowly destroying his red blood cells. After the initial 24 hour period, the victim will feel uncomfortable in the glaring light of the sun. He will also begin to crave rare meat, while finding all other foodstuffs increasingly unpalatable.

As the next four days pass, the victim will glean less and less sustenance from any solid food, be it rare meat or otherwise. As the victim’s blood thins, he will increasingly come to thirst for the only substance that can sustain him: the blood of his own species. Starting on day five and beyond, the victim can feed *only* on blood, and must drink a number of hit points’ worth of blood each day equal to his own Constitution score. If the infected victim fails to feed, he is wracked with pain and loses 1 point of Constitution; lost Constitution cannot be regained unless the victim is cured. Starting on the sixth day after infection, the victim must also make a madness check on any day he does not feed; failure indicates the victim goes berserk, attacking anyone within reach until he has fed. Each such madness check after the first incurs a

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cumulative -1 penalty. Infected player characters affected by this blood frenzy become NPCs until they have slaked their thirst.

A victim infected with the vampiric virus does not grow fangs, and must use some sharp tool or weapon to cause the bloodshed that he craves. Driven by this unnatural thirst while simultaneously repulsed by the deeds he commits to slake it, the pathetic victim of the vampiric virus will continue supping upon the veins of his kin until he is destroyed, either by the virus itself (by reducing the victim's Con to 0), or until some loved one strikes him down.

Unless the infected victim's heart is destroyed, he will rise up after three nights as a nosferatu vampire, still carrying the virus.

Treatment

The vampiric virus can be cured by three spells. The spells *cure disease* and *heal* can eliminate the disease, but only within a limited time frame. For each 12 hours that pass after the first day since infection, the chance of *cure disease* destroying the virus drops by 10%. *Heal* suffers the same limitation, but only starts to lose effectiveness after the fourth day. Thus, a *cure disease* spell cast two days after infection has only an 80% chance of curing the victim; the chance is the same for a *heal* cast five days after infection. The 7th level priest spell *sunray* can destroy the virus regardless of how much time has passed, although it cannot save a victim who has been slain and transformed into a nosferatu.

To cure an infected victim, all of the above spells must first penetrate the vampiric virus' 10% Magic Resistance. In an unusual adaptation, if the virus succeeds at its Magic Resistance roll it immediately spreads through the air. All living creatures within a 15 foot radius of the infected victim risk infection as though they had come in contact with the dormant virus (described above). The airborne virus dies within moments of leaving its host, and poses no risk to those further than 15 feet away.

If the steps taken to cure a victim are successful, the afflicted is left wracked with pain, but will soon make a full recovery, and will be immune to the vampiric virus for the rest of their lives. Lost Constitution returns at the rate of one point per week of bed rest.



ECHO

They Died Before Their Time

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ECHO

Climate/Terrain	Any
Frequency	Very Rare
Organization	Solitary
Activity Cycle	Night
Diet	Nil
Intelligence	Highly (13-14)
Treasure	Special
Alignment	Neutral
No. Appearing	1
Armor Class	2
Movement	15
Hit Dice	6
THAC0	14
No. of Attacks	1
Damage/Attacks	1d6
Special Attacks	Eternal Dirge
Special Defenses	+1 or better to hit
Magic Resistance	25%
Size	M (5' - 6' tall)
Morale	Steady (11-12)
XP Value	3,000

The death of a young human is almost always considered a tragedy, a life of promise snuffed out before its full potential could be reached. But to the long-lived elven race the early death of one of their young means not just the loss of decades, but centuries left un-lived. Sometimes, a young elf struck down before their time will be given a chance to live out the years stolen from them, and make sure that their incomplete lives are never forgotten.

Echoes are creatures much like the feared and hated banshee. These undead elven spectres take the forms that they had in life, but are now semi-transparent and radiate a luminous aura of blue-white light. The undead elves retain the natural grace and elegance characteristic of young, handsome elven males and beautiful elven maidens, but an unfathomable sorrow now mares their delicate features.

These tragic spirits drift about the place of their death, floating scant inches off the ground, maintaining an endless vigil over the area where their lives were cut short. With haunting voices they recite their short lives and the infinite possibilities that their ruined futures held for them, singing an ominous dirge which they will chant for the remainder of their unnatural existence.

Combat

Echoes are generally nonviolent creatures, due to the tentative hold they retain of the innocence of youth. As such will very rarely attack a living creature. The aspect of these creatures that makes them truly deadly is their eternal dirge. This song that sounds as if it is being performed from a great distance away, or is merely the echo of a song once sung, hence inspiring these creatures' name. Anyone who comes within 90 feet of an echo hears this mournful song and must succeed at a saving throw vs. spell or find themselves suffering from an unexplainable sense of grief, acting as a combination of the spells *slow* and *ray of enfeeblement* with the associated penalties added to one another. Those who fail to escape the dirge's effects within five rounds will lapse into a comatose state and will not awaken until 24 hours after they have been removed from earshot of the echo's haunting dirge. If a victim does fall unconscious within the area of the dirge and is not removed from it for an extended period of time they will wither away from exposure and starvation.

If attacked, an echo will first try to flee, but never stray far from the area to which they are bound (150 yards from the place of their death). If they are pursued to the limits of their small domains they will attack with their spectral fists. These incorporeal blows do no damage in and of themselves, but the intense chill of the grave so permeates an echo's spirit that anyone who comes into contact with one suffers 1d6 points of damage. Also, being spectral undead, echoes are immune to non-magical weapons, *charm*, *sleep*, and *hold* spells, and cold- and electrical-based magic. Echoes cling to their undeath tightly and as such are turned as wraiths. Despite the

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most brutal of attacks, an Echo will never cease its sorrowful chant until it is destroyed.

Even though Echoes are not aggressive creatures they know when anyone has entered their haunting grounds and will gravitate towards them in an instinctual need for their dirge to be heard. They will follow any sentient creature while they can and sing for them the versions of the life they will never have, regardless of whether the victim is capable of listening, or even conscious. Even if the victim does manage to flee, the eternal dirge can drift outside of the boundaries of an Echo's eternal prison to threaten a relatively large area.

Habitat/Society

Echoes are the ultimate victims. Everything that now shapes their identities was forced upon them; everything that made them who they were in life has been stolen. They have no choice but to stay within 150 yards of the site where they lost their lives, often haunting the very area where their decaying body still rests. They spend their days circling their domain, embellishing their mournful songs, and dwelling upon the events which stole their young lives.

Caring little for worldly treasure, echoes do not keep hoards of coins or other wealth. However, depending on the age of the spirit before its death, they may keep a small treasure trove of objects which were meaningful to them in life. The echoes of young elven children may have toys or remembrances of their lost parents, and girls may have small caches of brushes or jewelry, while young males often keep items of battle or musical instruments. Whatever the nature of the treasure or its worth, an echo will make every effort to protect its collection, blocking the way to their treasure's hiding spot and even attacking those who remove the items.

Echoes are solitary creatures for the most part. Unless tragedy creates several echoes in the same area, these spirits interact with no one save those that enter their domains, and as such have no real society. Echoes will not associate with others of their kind and seem completely unaware of the presence of any other undead in their haunting grounds.

Ecology

The presence of an echo has a great effect on the environment of the areas they inhabit. No animals of any kind will enter the domain of an echo and all animals will seem nervous while in the region, doing their best to stay at least a quarter mile from such a place. The home of an echo is often marked by the complete lack of any trace of animals, from spoor to sound. Besides the effect on animal life, the domain of an echo will usually be littered with the bodies of those who could not escape the song of

the dreaded spirit, and as such are forced to lie unburied and without their final rites. Often, the loss of one person to an echo has cost an entire search party their lives as they try to recover their companion from the domain of these pitiable, tortured creatures.



FIGURINES OF OBSESSION

Bad Things Come in Small Packages

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INTRODUCTION

The *RAVENLOFT MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix III* brought a new type of golem to light: the figurine. Similar to miniature golems, they have different powers and abilities based on their construction. This article goes beyond *Appendix III*, however, to include more types of materials, and to provide more detail for some better-known types of figurines.

Figurines & The Schools of Magic

Scholars have recently noticed that some kinds of figurines are linked to a specific school of magic. Not all figurines are so linked however.

This link results in several effects: The figurine is more susceptible to that school of magic, providing that the spell can affect the figurine in the first place, for good or ill. The figurine always suffers a -2 penalty to any saving throws vs. its linked school of magic and, if the spell is damaging, it suffers +2 points of damage per die. If the effect is healing, however, it receives +2 hp per die.

Conversely, figurines make saving throws against spells in direct opposition schools with a +2 bonus, and damage or healing is reduced by -2 per die.

Regardless of the linked school, if any, a *mending* spell always restores any figurine to full hit points.

The school of magic tied to each figurine is listed below:

Abjuration	Stone	Illusion	Porcelain
Alteration	Clay	Invocation	Metal
Conjuration	Obsidian	Necromancy	Bone
Divination	Crystal	Elemental	Wood
Enchantment	Ice	Wild Magic	Sand

If a spell from its linked school is cast upon a figurine in the process of creation (in addition to any spells required by the ritual) then the figurine will have maximum hit points and a +1 bonus to its THAC0. If an

opposition school's spell is used (again, in addition to the spells needed to grant it life) then it will have minimum hit points and a -1 penalty to its THAC0.

Note that not all figurines are tied to schools, and those that do not have a linked school are not affected in any special way by spells from certain schools.

All figurines, unless otherwise specified, are immune to weapons of less than +1 enchantment, life- and mind-affecting spells, poison, paralysis, and disease. If *dispel magic* is cast upon a figurine, and the spellcaster is equal to or a lower level than the figurine's creator, it must make a saving throw vs. death magic; failure means it falls dormant and does not radiate magic. It revives in a number of turns equal to the spellcaster's level. If the caster of the *dispel magic* is of greater level than the figurine's creator, then it must make a saving throw vs. death magic or be destroyed.

FIGURINE, BONE

Climate/Terrain	Any
Frequency	Very Rare
Organization	Solitary
Activity Cycle	Always
Diet	Nil
Intelligence	Average (8-10)
Treasure	Nil
Alignment	Neutral
No. Appearing	1
Armor Class	7
Movement	6
Hit Dice	4
THAC0	17
No. of Attacks	1
Damage/Attack	1d4
Special Attacks	See Below
Special Defenses	See Below
Magic Resistance	Nil
Size	T
Morale	Fearless (19-20)
XP Value	650

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Bone figurines are usually carved in the shape of small people, seals, or walruses. They are most often found in the northern lands of the Core and in Vorostokov, but can be found anywhere bones are common.

Bone figurines often have a glossy sheen. Their size does not reduce the danger posed by the sharp swords, spears, or tusks usually carved into the design.

In combat, a bone figurine attacks with its sharp weapons. With a successful attack, there is a 5% chance per point of damage inflicted that a sliver of bone breaks off in the wound and starts to work its way to the victim's nearest bone. This process takes 1d4 rounds. During this time the victim takes 1 point of damage each round. When the sliver reaches the bone, it fuses with that bone, and the figurine then takes control of that limb. Thus, the Dungeon Master will have to determine where the attack landed.

If the controlled limb is an arm, then the figurine can make attacks against the victim. The figurine uses its own THAC0 for these attacks, but gets a +4 bonus to hit due to the victim's inability to dodge its own limb. These attacks inflict damage as per the weapon held, plus any applicable Strength and/or magical bonuses. However, controlled limbs do *not* gain bonuses if the victim is specialized in the wielded weapon.

If the controlled limb is a leg, then the victim halves his movement rate and must make a Dexterity check each round or fall.

If the controlled body part is the head, then the victim is *feble-minded* (as the spell) until the figurine is destroyed. Destroying a bone figurine immediately breaks its control over all limbs in question.

The spells *animate dead* and *control undead*, as well as any spell specifically dealing with bones, has a special effect on these figurines. If any of these spells are cast on a figurine, it must succeed at a saving throw vs. spell or be *slowed* for a number of rounds equal to the spell's level. The bone figurine suffers this result *in place* of the spell's stated effects. Bone figurines suffer half damage from fire-, cold-, and electricity-based attacks.

To create a bone figurine, one must spend 3,000 gp for materials and cast the following spells during the creation process: *animate dead*, *domination*, and *minor creation*. It takes a month to create such a figurine.

FIGURINE, CLAY

Climate/Terrain	Any
Frequency	Very Rare
Organization	Solitary
Activity Cycle	Always
Diet	Nil
Intelligence	Semi- (2-4)
Treasure	Nil
Alignment	Neutral
No. Appearing	1
Armor Class	6
Movement	6
Hit Dice	4
THAC0	17
No. of Attacks	1
Damage/Attack	1d2
Special Attacks	See below
Special Defenses	See below
Magic Resistance	Nil
Size	T
Morale	Fearless (19-20)
XP Value	975

Clay figurines are always found in the form of masks set with strange runes, colors, and designs. They are said to have originated in Sri Raji.

A clay figurine almost always has a crude, rough texture and shapes. However, some may have been glazed, and these appear shiny and smooth.

A clay figurine is a very subtle creature, and never attacks outright until it is in an advantageous position to do so. Thus, it waits for someone to don it as a mask before attacking. It makes one attack with a +4 bonus to hit, and the only adjustments to the victim's AC are those for Dexterity. The attack takes the form of bands of clay stretching out from the sides and top of the mask to encase the victim's entire head in a shell of clay; this causes no damage. If the attack fails, then the victim has thrown the mask off before it could close its grasp. In this case, the figurine usually sprouts half-formed legs and tries to scuttle away. If attacked when not attached to a face, the mask can defend itself by biting for 1d2 points of damage, but tries to flee above all else.

If the figurine successfully attaches itself around a victim's head, then it can only be removed by being destroyed. Any attacks on the mask cause the wearer to suffer half the damage as well (the mask still suffers normal damage). While the mask is being worn, the victim can clearly be seen underneath, as there is no actual connection between flesh and the clay.

The mask has no magical control over the victim, but it will demonstrate its intentions by sealing its mouth and nose holes shut. The victim will start to suffocate according to the rules in the *Player's Handbook*, but the figurine only keeps this up for a round or two, just to get

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its point across. Though the mask cannot speak, it can convey emotions and general ideas to its host, and if these are not followed the mask may become angry and suffocate its wearer for longer and longer periods. Sometimes the mask mimics the features of its host or those of other people, but its mimicry is crude and easily seen as a ruse.

The only other offensive power the clay figurine has is that it can cause the runes and designs on its face to swirl; those viewing this are affected as if by a *hypnotic pattern*.

In addition to its other effects, casting a successful *dispel magic* on a clay figurine will force it to disengage from its host, if it has one. A *stone shape* spell can remove a clay figurine from a face if it fails a saving throw vs. spell, and a *transmute mud to rock* spell hardens the creature, giving it AC 3 but placing it under the effects a *slow* spell for a number of rounds equal to the caster's level. Clay figurines suffer half damage from cold and electrical attacks, but fire causes them to melt, doing +1 points of damage per die. Such attacks will remove a figurine attached to a face . . . but these methods will not bode well for the host.

To create a clay figurine, one must first construct a workshop, which costs 5,000 gp. Each figurine can be created for 5,000 gp after this. The spells required to create the clay figurine are *stone shape*, *transmute rock to mud*, and *hypnotic pattern*.

FIGURINE, ICE

Climate/Terrain	Any cold
Frequency	Very Rare
Organization	Solitary
Activity Cycle	Always
Diet	Nil
Intelligence	Semi- (2-4)
Treasure	Nil
Alignment	Neutral
No. Appearing	1
Armor Class	5
Movement	6
Hit Dice	5
THAC0	15
No. of Attacks	1
Damage/Attack	1d4+1
Special Attacks	See Below
Special Defenses	See Below
Magic Resistance	Nil
Size	T-S
Morale	Fearless (19-20)
XP Value	650

An ice figurine is beautiful, but deadly. They are often carved in the forms of elegant animals, such as

birds, or fantastical creatures like mermaids. It has perfectly smoothed edges and sides, and the light plays off and through it in a most delightfully enchanting manner. It is amazing that such a thing of beauty can harbor such hatred for the living.

Ice figurines are magical constructs, and will not melt in anything but the most extreme temperatures, such as those found in tropical jungles or deserts. In these climes they suffer 1 point of damage per turn. Otherwise, the magic of their creation allows them to maintain their form until destroyed.

An ice figurine attacks with whatever its shape allows it to. Typically, this allows it one attack a round, causing 1d4+1 points of piercing damage plus 1d6 points of additional damage from intense cold that it projects at the point of contact. The victim of this attack must also save vs. spell or lose one point of Strength and one point of Constitution for one hour. Victims reduced to 0 Strength or Constitution are not killed, but fall into fits of shivering, unable to take any action. Such a victim must receive warmth within 5 rounds or die. This can be as simple as wrapping the victim in a blanket, however.

If an ice figurine falls dormant after succumbing to *dispel magic*, the magic sustaining it quickly degenerates. Unless the surrounding temperature is below freezing, the figurine loses 1 hp per round. This is usually enough to kill the creature.

As a creature of ice, an ice figurine is uniquely affected by spells. Casting water-based spells, or tossing normal or holy water on a the figurine heals it for as much damage as the action would normally cause (2d4 hp per flask of water, 3d8+3 hp for a gallon bucket). Cold-based spells do no damage to an ice figurine, but those based on fire cause an extra point of damage per die and the figurine suffers a -2 penalty to saving throws against them.

The creation of an ice figurine requires an outlay of only 1,000 gp, to buy the best tools available. However, the figurine can only be created in temperatures below freezing. The spells needed are *transmute dust to water*, *chill touch*, and *ice storm*.

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FIGURINE, METAL

Climate/Terrain	Any
Frequency	Very Rare
Organization	Solitary
Activity Cycle	Always
Diet	Nil
Intelligence	Low (5-7)
Treasure	Nil
Alignment	Neutral
No. Appearing	1
Armor Class	2
Movement	6
Hit Dice	6
THAC0	15
No. of Attacks	1
Damage/Attack	2d4
Special Attacks	See below
Special Defenses	See below
Magic Resistance	Nil
Size	T
Morale	Fearless (19-20)
XP Value	1,400

Metal figurines are perhaps the rarest of all varieties. Not many metalsmiths turn their attention to statues; in fact, the most common place to find a figurine of this nature is in a church or other holy spot.

Metal figurines vary in appearance, but they are often an icon of some religious sect's beliefs. They are often smooth and polished, with no visible flaws in craftsmanship.

As has been mentioned, metal figurines are most often worshipped by sects and cults. Those that are not have no special powers other than those common to all figurines.

Those that do represent deities or other magnificent beings, however, gain a special sonic attack. They absorb the prayers that are showered upon them, and can release them and augment them with their metallic construction. When they release this blast, all creatures within thirty feet must save vs. breath weapon. Those who fail lose 25% of their current hit points, while those who succeed suffer only half that damage. Also, those who fail the saving throw go deaf for five rounds: They suffer a -1 penalty to surprise rolls and have a 20% of miscasting spells with a verbal component until they recover their hearing. The metal figurine will avoid using this attack while those who worship it are present, for fear of losing their adoration. To recharge this ability, the figurine must be worshipped steadily for a week.

Another important note is that those metal figurines which are worshipped gain sustenance from their worshippers, and thus have maximum hit points.

The figurine loses its stored echo power if it succumbs to a *dispel magic*. Spells such as *transmute*

metal to wood and *transmute metal to bone* alter the figurine, giving it an AC of 6 for a number of rounds equal to the caster's level and negating its sonic attack. Any sound-based spell cast at a metal figurine is reflected back at the caster.

Heat- and fire-based spells only inflict half damage to metal figurines, while cold-based spells inflict full damage. Metal figurines are immune to electrical attacks.

One must have the properly equipped forge and tools to create a metal figurine, costing 8,000 gp. After this, each figurine may be created for 5,000 gp. The necessary spells are *shout*, *strength*, and *wall of iron*.

FIGURINE, SAND

Climate/Terrain	Any
Frequency	Very Rare
Organization	Solitary
Activity Cycle	Always
Diet	Nil
Intelligence	Semi- (2-4)
Treasure	Nil
Alignment	Neutral
No. Appearing	1
Armor Class	7
Movement	6
Hit Dice	4
THAC0	17
No. of Attacks	1
Damage/Attack	1d6
Special Attacks	See below
Special Defenses	See below
Magic Resistance	20%
Size	T
Morale	Fearless (19-20)
XP Value	975

Sand figurines are probably the rarest of all. They are unstable and very hard to create, requiring the sand be formed and then heated to retain their shape. Sand figurines very rarely have any specific features. They can be in any form imaginable, but they always have a appear very rough and primitive.

Sand figurines attack by slashing with one of their extremities. Their rough texture and grit allows them to cause more damage than one might expect. They also leave a small amount of sand in the wounds they inflict, causing 1 point of damage per round as the figurine causes its sand to fester and rub. Victims can halt this damage only by destroying the figurine or by spending a round to wash the sand from their wounds.

Like the clay figurine, the sand figurine has the power to alter its shape, but the sand figurine uses this ability much more frequently; thus it can be encountered in any number of forms. Because of its shifting nature

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and its base in wild magic, the sand figurine has 20% magic resistance, and all weapons only inflict half damage (plus any applicable magical plusses). Any spell blocked by the figurine's magic resistance is not dissipated, but instead converted into a wild surge; see the *Tome of Magic* for more details.

The sand figurine is vulnerable to spells involving water, but fire- and cold-based spells inflict the minimum possible damage. Water-based spells *slow* the figurine for a number of rounds equal to the caster's level. Sand figurines are immune to electricity-based spells.

Spells like *transmute rock to mud* weaken the stone figurine, lowering its AC to 8 and *slowing* it for 5 rounds. The reversed version of the spell can heal the figurine if additional mud is provided to fill the figurine's cracks. A *stone shape* spell will cause the figurine to lose its hold on its victim if it fails a saving throw vs. spell.

Fire- and electricity-based spells only inflict half damage to metal figurines but those based on cold cause normal damage.

A stone figurine can be created for 5,000 gp. The spells required are *statue*, *stoneskin*, and *strength*.

FIGURINE, STONE

Climate/Terrain	Any
Frequency	Very Rare
Organization	Solitary
Activity Cycle	Always
Diet	Nil
Intelligence	Low (5-7)
Treasure	Nil
Alignment	Neutral
No. Appearing	1
Armor Class	3
Movement	6
Hit Dice	5
THAC0	15
No. of Attacks	1
Damage/Attack	1d6
Special Attacks	See Below
Special Defenses	See Below
Magic Resistance	Nil
Size	T
Morale	Fearless (19-20)
XP Value	650

Stone figurines are another rare variety. They are often carved in the forms of gargoyles or other strange and fantastical creatures. Stone figurines often have a rough, unfinished look, but some may be polished and smooth. They usually have different colors on them, and may have veins of bright metal interlaced within their bodies. When the figurine is active, these veins seem to pulse and glow with an inner light.

Stone figurines are powerful creatures, but have no magical attacks. Instead, they try to latch onto their victims and hold on, squeezing and crushing with the strength of the great rocks they are composed of. A successful attack inflicts 1d6 points of damage per round, and the figurine can only be removed by a successful Bend Bars/Lift Gates roll, or by destroying the figurine. If the figurine succumbs to a *dispel magic* and falls dormant, it does not release its grip on the victim, but does not keep squeezing either. In this case, an Open Doors roll is sufficient to pry the figurine loose.

FIGURINE, STRAW

Climate/Terrain	Any
Frequency	Very Rare
Organization	Solitary
Activity Cycle	Always
Diet	Nil
Intelligence	Semi- (2-4)
Treasure	Nil
Alignment	Neutral
No. Appearing	1
Armor Class	7
Movement	6
Hit Dice	4
THAC0	17
No. of Attacks	1
Damage/Attack	1d3
Special Attacks	See below
Special Defenses	See below
Magic Resistance	Nil
Size	T
Morale	Fearless (19-20)
XP Value	420

The straw figurine is most commonly made by peasant folk. It is woven in such a way that it resembles an animal of some sort. The straw figurine is most often woven in the form of a humanoid figure. It has no face, and the hands are just bundles of straw folded over. Often the figure wears small clothes made from scraps of cloth, but this isn't always the case.

The straw figurine attacks by lashing out with its hands or other extremities. Its attacks are weak, but they have an annoying power. Every time the creature strikes someone, that person is affected by the 2nd level wizard spell *irritation*; there is no saving throw against this power. The victim suffers one of the two results of the spell, chosen at random.

The straw figurine is immune to normal flames, but suffers a -2 penalty to save vs. any magical fire and damage is increased by 1 point per die. Cold-based attacks do not affect this creature, and electrical attacks inflict half damage.

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Constructing a straw figurine costs 2,000 gp and requires the following spells: *charm plants*, *irritation*, and *plant growth*.

FIGURINE, WOOD

Climate/Terrain	Any
Frequency	Very Rare
Organization	Solitary
Activity Cycle	Always
Diet	Nil
Intelligence	Low (5-7)
Treasure	Nil
Alignment	Neutral
No. Appearing	1
Armor Class	5
Movement	6
Hit Dice	5
THAC0	15
No. of Attacks	1
Damage/Attack	1d4+2
Special Attacks	See below
Special Defenses	See below
Magic Resistance	Nil
Size	T
Morale	Fearless (19-20)
XP Value	650

Wood figurines are one of the more common varieties, because of the wide-based and easily learned skill of woodcarving. There is no specific shape attributed to these creatures.

A wood figurine attacks by flailing its extremities or stabbing with any sharp edges it may have. A successful attack from a wood figurine can be deadly, due to its nature. Those struck by the figurine must successfully save vs. spell or have the six inch area of their flesh surrounding the point where they were struck turned to wood! If the area of flesh is a joint, then that joint can no longer bend; otherwise this transformation won't have much effect in the short term. In the long term however, blood and other fluids will not be able to circulate past the wooden area, and the any isolated body parts will turn gangrenous and die within 1d3 days. Also, the victim's body will begin to reject the wooden area, and that area will become inflamed and swollen. This causes a loss of 1 point of Constitution per day infection spreads, causing weakness. If the victim is reduced to a Constitution of 3 he will be too weak to get out of bed. Only immediate amputation or magical healing will cure this deadly infection. Of course, amputation makes the idea of saving the limb much more difficult.

To cure this effect, a *transmute wood to metal* and a *stone to flesh* spell must be cast within one round of each other on the affected area. Then the victim must make a

system shock roll. If the roll fails then the area immediately dies from the strain, possibly killing the patient as well. Otherwise, the area is restored to normal.

The wood figurine saves vs. fire-based attacks with a -1 penalty, but suffers no extra damage. It suffers half damage against cold and electrical attacks.

To create a wood figurine, one must spend 1,500 gp on tools and cast the following spells: *item*, *major creation*, and *strength*.



THE SWORD OF THE CLAN APBLANC

A Shard of Hope in a Forlorn Land

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DESCRIPTION

T

he Sword of the Clan ApBlanc is a Claymore with a five-foot blade and a hilt adorned with a Celtic design. Originally a mundane blade, the sword's fate was forever altered when Tristen ApBlanc, the darklord of Forlorn, used it to murder his

son Morholt in the Forfar year of 1833 (446 by the Barovian calendar).

History

In the year 1833 of the Forfar calendar Morholt, the second son of Tristen ApBlanc and Lady Isolt, had made friends with a priest by the name of Duncan ApDuguid. Without the knowledge of his parents, Morholt planned on joining Duncan's order of warrior-poets in the worship of Morrigan, Celtic goddess of war. Morholt did not inform his parents of his decision until the summer of that fateful year, and when he did Tristen simmered with rage. Soon thereafter, when Duncan had accepted an invitation to visit the young ApBlanc at the Lord's Tower, Tristen hatched a plot to kill the young priest as he slept. Unbeknownst to Tristen, Duncan had complained to Morholt that his bed in the guest quarters was uncomfortable, so, being a chivalrous and kind young man, Morholt gave up his own bed to Duncan, taking Duncan's bed for himself. When Tristen crept into Duncan's room and drove his sword through the sleeper, he was shocked to discover that he had murdered not Duncan, but his own son.

In the ferocity of Tristen's attack, a shard of metal had snapped off the sword's blade, and the clerics tending to Morholt's body discovered it still lodged in his side.

Tristen hid the incriminating sword in the highest level of the castle's south tower for over a year, the sword's missing shard forever linking it to the murder. It was not until after the death of the Lady Isolt that Tristen recovered the weapon for his own use. Soon thereafter the blade disappeared from his possession; its current whereabouts are unknown.

Powers

The Sword of the Clan ApBlanc became enchanted following the murder of Morholt. It is believed that a portion of the lad's spirit resides within the weapon, thus giving it powers to be used against his father and similar creatures.

Though the Sword of Clan ApBlanc detects as magical, none of its special powers will operate until the missing shard of metal has been returned to the sword. The missing shard is currently believed to be located somewhere within the walls of Castle Tristenoira.

The Sword of the Clan ApBlanc functions as a *Claymore* +2, but can inflict damage to any ghost of up through fourth magnitude. The blade also possesses several other enchantments linked to Morholt and the beliefs associated with those who worship his deity. As a follower of Morrigan, Celtic goddess of war, Morholt was to have been a priest and a warrior; thus the blade retains powers directly related to both callings.

- ❖ Once per day the blade grants the wielder *cure serious wounds* (as per the priest spell). The spell is initiated by uttering the phrase "Oh, Morrigan preserve us!"
- ❖ Once per week the blade can be used to *inspire* (as per the bard ability) the wielder's followers or allies,

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as well as the wielder. When this power is used, those within the targeted group will begin to hear the playing of bagpipes, inspiring them to fight courageously in battle. This grants the party either +1 on attack rolls, a +1 to saving throws, or a +2 bonus to morale. The effect lasts for a total of 10 rounds. The spell is initiated by uttering the phrase, "Oh, Morrigan be with us!"

- ❖ Once per month the blade grants the wielder *Speak with Dead* (as per the priest spell). The spell is initiated by uttering the phrase "Oh, Morrigan speak with us!"

- ❖ The Sword will cease to exist as a magical weapon if an adventurer can travel back to the time of 1833 on the Forfar calendar and prevent the murder of Morholt ApBlanc.



Hindrances

Unfortunately for the wielder, the Mists of Ravenloft added several more abilities to the Sword of the Clan ApBlanc's repertoire when they drew the land of Forfar into the demiplane.

As with the special powers of the sword, none of these curses will take effect until the metal shard has been rejoined with the weapon.

- ❖ When faced with a battle including more than ten combatants (including allies), the Sword of the Clan ApBlanc will function as a Cursed Sword of Berserking. The wielder will fly into a warrior rage, attacking the nearest creature and continuing to fight until dead or until no living thing remains within 60 feet. The wielder is allowed a saving throw vs. spell with a -2 penalty in order to resist the rage. It is unknown if the sword can be exorcised of this curse through a *remove curse* or *wish* spell, as with normal Cursed Swords of Berserking.
- ❖ The Sword of the Clan ApBlanc loses all of its magical abilities for 1d10 days if it is ever used to harm a priest of any alignment.
- ❖ If the wielder of the Sword of the Clan ApBlanc ever willingly flees a battle, he or she will be despondent for 1d4 hours. The character will suffer a -4 penalty on all ability checks and -2 penalty on all other checks during this time. The character will often utter the following phrase, "Morrigan will not tolerate fear in her followers;" for the remainder of the time he is non-responsive.

Means of Destruction

The Sword of the Clan ApBlanc can be destroyed in two different ways.

- ❖ The Sword of the Clan ApBlanc will be destroyed if it causes the ultimate demise of darklord Tristen ApBlanc.

VAN RICHTEN'S GUIDE TO THE MISTS

A Little Learning is a Dangerous Thing

by "Kalias Trivune, the Mad Bard of Alfheim"

Based on an original concept by Matthew Barrett

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INTRODUCTION

As he ran through the wilderness, the slobbering, rabid creatures at his feet, Fleetfoot Treewalker cursed himself for his stupidity and ignorance. Of course there had to be more than one werewolf in the pack! That's why they attacked him the night after he slew the alpha male! Had he heeded the *Guide's* instructions and warnings?

The *Guide!* Fleetfoot quickly grabbed his pack; it was still there. Thank the gods. If he lost that now, there would be no way out for him. He would lose everything he had set out to accomplish. Since he had found the book in the ransacked camp, the half-elven ranger had learned much about werewolves and their kin. He found their weaknesses as well, and had killed the most powerful of the beasts a fortnight ago.

Unfortunately, it had not been the only werewolf in the pack. As far as Fleetfoot could tell, at least three others were stalking him, chasing him through these damned black woods.

Then, finally, to his horror, he reached the forest's edge; a valley stretched ahead of him for miles, with no cover or shelter. They would take him down in five minutes, if even that long, if he continued to run.

The howling behind him caused Fleetfoot to turn and stare back at the oncoming pack of wolves. He unsheathed his sword. If they wanted a fight, they could have it.

"I only wish Van Richten himself were here—he would know what to do!"

The fog around him thickened, and the pack leapt at him, tearing at his clothes, his hair, and his limbs. He felt the hot blood rush from his wounds, and his blade made

the wolves and werewolves bleed in turn. The fog that had seemingly appeared from nowhere continued to grow thicker and thicker, until it obscured all vision, and the ranger was completely blinded.

In the light of his new cover, Fleetfoot turned and ran across the valley. Faster, faster—he heard the wolves giving chase, but they sounded dull and distant. Finally, the blinding fog lifted, quite suddenly, and Fleetfoot found himself alone. And lost. None of his surroundings looked familiar at all, and he had lived and tracked the forest and valley for as long as he could remember!

"Lost, traveler?" he heard a voice behind him say. He spun quickly, and found himself face-to-face with a thin young man, smiling widely at him. "It's getting dark, you know, and the full moon will be rising soon. Here, let me take you to meet my family. Then we'll figure out what to do with you. What's your name?"

Grateful for the assistance, Fleetfoot gladly regaled the man with conversation: his name, family, life, and the last strange experience, which the youth seemed to take quite an interest in. Finally, they approached a circle of stones, where more men and women stood, looking curiously at them as they approached. One of them came close.

"Who's this, Alfred?"

The young man smiled.

"He says his name is Fleetfoot Treewalker, a forest warrior from some far-away land. I decided to bring him here and see if his story held up." Curious, Fleetfoot asked just what was happening. The young man smiled in reply. "You say your name is Fleetfoot? Well, we're going to see if it truly suits you. We're all going to play a simple game with one simple rule: If you don't get caught, you don't die."

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Suddenly aware that something was not right, the half-elf quickly surveyed the scene; the men and women were bathing in the glow of the full moon and—and changing! Instinctively, Fleetfoot's hand went to his pack where the *Guide* was hidden, blindly grasping around to find it. His hand closed on air.

It was gone!

The young man's nose pressed outward as he growled the next words: "You have five minutes to make it to the border. If you don't . . ." he snarled, licking his lips, "it's dinnertime."

Description

This leather-bound volume measures about 6" tall x 4" wide x 1" thick. Emblazoned on the cover are the words *Rudolph van Richten's Guide to* with the last word faded beyond readability. The book itself looks quite new, with crisp pages and a leather clasp. When the book is opened, however, the full title is written, perhaps in a very fancy style, in the language most fluent to the creature opening it.

History

Marcus Mirtchkin, the only son of a farming family in the domain of Mordent, was told by his mother to go into Mordentshire to purchase medication for his ailing father. In a stroke of sheer luck, or folly, the young man wandered into Rudolph van Richten's herbalist shop. After buying the few herbs his mother had asked him to, the young man noticed a copy of *Van Richten's Guide to Ghosts* on a shelf. Asking the young lady working the counter about the book, she explained that it was a treatise on the motives, investigation, and destruction of incorporeal creatures that plagued the land, and that her late uncle had written it. Intrigued, the young man bought it with his mother's remaining coins. When Marcus returned home, and his mother asked him about the extra money; he lied, saying that the herbs cost a little more than usual, as they were nearly out of stock. Then he hid the *Guide* under his pillow, planning to read it after dinner.

That night, Marcus read as much of the *Guide* as he could understand. The parts he couldn't read, he marked off and showed to his aunt, a very wise and intelligent, but crippled woman. She explained it to him, and taught him how to read those words he didn't know. What Marcus did not know was that his Aunt Vivian was, in actuality, an arcanist of modest talents. She was heartened by her nephew's interest in the crusade against evil, and though she couldn't leave her chair, she secretly encouraged him to follow his heart and be strong.

Eventually, Marcus decided to take what he had learned from the *Guide* to make a profit. He found that a

nearby farm was experiencing a relatively minor haunting problem. Secretly leaving his home, he traveled the mile to his neighbor's farm, and asked about the problem. The neighbor explained that he believed it was the ghost of his wife, who had died three months earlier. Using the methods outlined in the *Guide*, Marcus discovered that something in the house that belonged to the deceased woman had been kept beyond her death, and drew her back. Her widower was able to explain that the item was an antique ebony box containing a lock of her father's hair, a man who had died in the wars between Falkovnia and Darkon. After the box was buried in her grave, the haunting stopped.

Excited at the success of his first real ghost hunt, Marcus proudly confronted his mother, who was upset that he hadn't been doing his chores, and told her the whole truth. Marcus thought his mother would be just as proud as he, but instead she was horrified that he'd put himself in so much danger. She demanded he give her the *Guide* and never speak of it again. Of course, Marcus just returned to his aunt, who had gotten an earful from her sister, and asked if she knew anything else about ghost hunting. She said she could take it one step further: She knew where he could find a real ghost to hunt. Giving him details about the creature, the unearthly menace that had crippled her in the first place, she provided him with an enchanted dagger as well as a suit of padded armor that would protect him from the creature's debilitating touch. She also provided him with an antique gold and adamantite ring she said would enthrall the ghost on sight, giving Marcus time to send it to its final rest. She warned him that it was not just a cursory haunting, and by force of its own will and evil this creature had defied the grave, so he must be careful.

Cecilia, Marcus' mother, became suspicious when her son was absent for more than a few hours, when he was supposed to have milked the cows and come right home. She confronted her sister, who told her where Marcus had gone. Panicked, Cecilia ran as fast as she could to the old, abandoned house, and found her son in the cellar, dying. The battle between the creature and Marcus had been brutal, but in the end, the living prevailed over the dead, and the ghost was laid to rest. However, Marcus had fallen through a flight of rotted stairs during the fight, ripping off his protective armor, and the creature had paralyzed his chest and heart in the last moments of the battle. He smiled at his mother, asking if she was proud of him. When she didn't answer, his heart finally gave out, and he died.

The day of Marcus' funeral was the day of one of the worst thunderstorms Mordent had ever seen. When the priestesses of Hala had departed after the burial, Marcus' mother took the book that had done her such wrong, had stolen her only son, the *Guide to Ghosts*, to the Misty Border near the edge of the farm. Having heard legends

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that the Mists were powerful, she shouted above the thunder and pronounced a hateful curse upon the book:

*You who steal my only son, on this night you are undone!
All who use you feel my wrath; may they tread my son's dread path!
Be e'er wrapped in misty shroud, should they speak their questions 'loud!
Draw them to my son's last rest; may they face his horrors' test!*

At that moment, a bolt of lightning lanced out of the dark sky above and struck the woman dead. However, something heard her dark curse, and the Mists rolled over the book.

Powers

Heroes will only find the book while on the hunt for a particular creature of the night, or right before such a hunt begins. The *Guide* will always be found in a conspicuous location, obviously placed there to be noticed by passersby. If the characters opens the book, they will discover the tome's subject happens to be the same type of creature they are hunting (for example, if a lich is pestering the party, it will be *Van Richten's Guide to the Lich*, or if a vampire, the *Guide to Vampires*). The subject cannot change while it stays with any particular group. While it is used, no ill effects occur as long as the heroes read the book to themselves and show no curiosity about the book's past or the creatures detailed within. However, if a character is reading or holding the book when they ask a question about where the book came from, the different subjects within, or where it was written, a dire fate awaits them.

Over the next few days, anyone who was with the character when the question was asked will sense that they are being watched. Then, one day, they will find themselves on a road to somewhere they have never heard of. Perhaps the Mists will creep over them in their sleep. Perhaps a sudden storm will leave an oddly thick fog behind. But one way or another, the group will find themselves trapped in the dread domains of Ravenloft, and their precious *Guide* will be lost to them. While the Mists draw in those who willingly want to enter, the book is cursed to never return to their embrace, and will be found by another group, somewhere in another library, on the hunt for another monster.

Depending upon the title of the *Guide*, there are several different places a party could end up:

Vampires	Castle Ravenloft in Barovia
The Lich	Castle Avernus in Necropolis
Ghosts	The Mirtchkin farm in Mordent

Werebeasts	The Circle in Verbrek
The Created	Schloss Mordenheim in Lamordia
Ancient Dead	The Pharaoh's Rest in Har' Akir
Fiends	Shadowborn Manor
Vistani	A Vistani encampment in Invidia
Witches	The Three Hags' home in Tepest

Adventure Ideas

- ❖ The adventures leading up to finding the *Guide* could be in pursuit of a foe Van Richten wrote about, possibly one that escaped into the Mists, avoiding capture and death by exploiting the fact that its weaknesses remain unknown to its pursuers. (Such as an elven vampire with an immunity to purely wooden stakes.)
- ❖ Perhaps the creature is drawn into Ravenloft with the party and goes insane, or if not, it will definitely be angry at the characters for trapping it. The characters would now have to either deal with the creature or escape quickly, turning the villain into a recurring character.
- ❖ The loss of the *Guide* will be a puzzlement to the characters in question, and they appear near the Mirtchkin family farm on a stormy night, seeking shelter. Within, they find the ghost of Aunt Vivian, a spirit tortured by Marcus' death (2nd magnitude), and very friendly. However, she will warn the characters not to stay long as her sister has turned into a vengeful spectre (3rd magnitude), which will try to destroy them when she finds them. (Perhaps the farm has been turned into a pocket domain and she the lord.)
- ❖ Marcus has been cursed to haunt the abandoned house in which he slew his final ghost. He's a benign spirit (1st magnitude), seeking only his mother's approval and forgiveness. If he can be convinced of this, or if she can confront him herself somehow and tell him, he can be laid to rest.



RING OF THE WOLF

This Ring's Going to the Dogs

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DESCRIPTION

This item appears to be nothing more than a well-crafted silver ring, carved to resemble the face of a wolf, with two emerald chips for eyes. The ring is very valuable for its construction and artistic quality alone (about 5,000 gp in Ravenloft or \$250 in the 1890s of Gothic Earth).

Powers

Anyone who takes possession of this ring will find that canine creatures seem to take a great interest in him or her, and most will seem very friendly and submissive (canines with greater than animal intelligence find the character fascinating; all other canines consider him or her their master unless already controlled by a domain lord or a greater minion of the Red Death). No canine creature will attack the owner of this ring without direct provocation or external influence (such as a command by a domain lord or other magical influence). This power is in effect as long as the ring is in the character's possession, whether it is worn or not.

Phase One

When the ring is worn, the owner will find his or her senses seem to be enhanced. The character can see reasonably well in darkness (30' infravision; both the pupils of his or her eyes and the gemstones on the ring seem to turn dark red when this power is in use) and gains heightened smell, taste, and hearing (either the character gains the Tracking and Alertness proficiencies, or gains a +3 to the skill check if already possessed).

Phase Two

After wearing the ring for eight hours (they need not be consecutive hours, but see below), one other function of the ring becomes available, but its curse begins to take effect as well. At the end of the eighth hour, the wearer

of the ring will suddenly learn that he or she can assume the form of a wolf at will, for as long as the ring is worn! This transformation is painful; the character writhes on the ground defenseless for a number of rounds equal to the steps between his or her alignment and Chaotic Evil. (1 round if Neutral Evil or Chaotic Neutral, 2 if Lawful Evil, True Neutral or Chaotic Good, 3 if Neutral Good, and 4 if Lawful Good.) Anyone viewing this must make a horror check if they were not expecting this transformation, and a fear check if they were (its a terrifying sight to behold). The character also discovers at this time that two other effects have happened: He or she is now *very* reluctant to part with the ring for any reason, and the character is now unable to eat plant matter, being only capable of stomaching liquids and meat.

Phase Three

If the character wears the ring for another eight hours—or uses the shape-changing function even once—the final phase of the curse takes effect; his or her alignment is shifted one step towards Chaotic Evil immediately (the Lawful/Neutral/Chaotic axis shifts first, then the Good/Neutral/Evil axis). There is no added benefit in this phase. Now the character can remove the ring, but as long as it remains on his or her person, the curse will continue to grow. The character will not willingly part with the ring at all at this point.

Hindrances

A *remove curse* spell will allow the character to part with the ring at this point, and twenty-four hours away from the ring (at any time) will drop the number of hours the character has worn it by one as far as the curse is concerned. This process becomes more difficult, however, after the next eight hours. At this point, only an *atonement* spell or equivalent ritual will allow the character to be rid of the ring and its effects. The character finds that he no longer needs to wear the ring to use its powers, but can call upon them at will. The character also learns of two new abilities: The first is that

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the character can assume the form of a wolf-man at will, and the second is that he or she is now unable to eat cooked meat of any kind.

Assuming the wolf-man form grants the character statistics similar to a mountain loup-garou (*RAVENLOFT MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix III*), except the character retains his or her class and level and takes normal damage from magical weapons. Each time the character uses the power to take wolf-man form, his alignment slips one step towards Chaotic Evil.

Once the character is Chaotic Evil, the ring is no longer needed; the character has been transformed completely into a maledictive lycanthrope (Loup Garou, Mountain), and is now subject to all of the hindrances and benefits of such a creature (including NPC status).

It is rumored that the Ring of the Wolf is only one of a set of similar rings, each devoted to a different type of werebeast. Whether or not this is true remains to be seen



AZALIN'S CROWN

This Crown Carries a Heavy Burden

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INTRODUCTION

f all the dark schemes and artifacts the lich-lord Azalin created, one stands out not for its notoriety, but for its total lack of notice. The iron crown Azalin wore while darklord of Darkon, one of the first magical items he created after becoming ruler of his domain, has gone missing since the grand experiment in Il Aluk. Anyone wishing to claim the land of Necropolis as his or her own would certainly search it out if they knew of its existence, but still it has yet to be found. With the dark magic woven into this artifact, this may be more of a blessing than a curse.

History

The darklord of Darkon created a very special crown of iron when he realized precisely what curse had befallen him. The Crown was an attempt to ease Azalin's misery over his imprisonment through a project of sufficient complexity to occupy his formidable mind.

Azalin's Crown was cold-forged from iron taken from deep underneath Darkon and not exposed to sunlight until completed. The central spire is decorated with a single yellow gemstone, the origin of which remains a mystery. When finished to his exacting specifications, Azalin enchanted the crown himself to be a representation of Darkon and the curse that kept him there; a grim poetry set in metal and stone. The Crown has a minimalist elegance in its engraving and shape.

As to the fate of this this item since the catastrophic Requiem in Il Aluk, who can say? Perhaps, somewhere in that decaying city, this cursed item lays in wait . . .

Powers and Curses

The Crown's powers are simple but useful, acting as a *helm of comprehending languages and reading magic*, meant to give its creator these capabilities without the expenditure of any precious magic. The Crown also has several special curses woven into its material, however.

Whenever a living or intelligent undead being other than Azalin dons the Crown, the curses take effect.

First, the wearer cannot leave Necropolis with the Crown. He, she, or it is effectively trapped within the borders of Necropolis. Second, the wearer becomes extremely reluctant to part with the Crown; eventually wearing it at all times.

The wearer also gains an almost insatiable desire for knowledge, but this is offset as the Crown drains away the knowledge of its wearer. The bearer of the crown is completely unable to learn anything new. Any new skills simply evaporate from their mind, stolen by the Crown. In game terms, the afflicted character can continue to gain experience, but cannot do anything new with it. From the point the character starts to wear the Crown, he, she, or it cannot gain any new proficiencies or secondary skills, nor can they improve any thieving skills they might possess. Spell-casting characters cannot learn new spells, nor can they learn to use new spell levels. This means that a wizard who gained the Crown at 10th level can theoretically advance to 20th level, but will still only have the skills and spell abilities of a 10th-level mage. The character may still use whatever abilities were gained beforehand, however, and THACO and hit points continue to advance as normal.

This constant absorption of knowledge, combined with the obsession for learning imparted by the Crown, causes unbearable frustration in the victim who wears it. This was one of Azalin's rare forays into humor. If some soul so desires the throne of Necropolis, he should have everything that goes with it. The only known ways for the Crown's curse to be broken are either for Azalin to remove it, or for it to be given to one with a true hunger for power, such as a would-be conqueror or archmage.

There is no known way to destroy the Crown, and it is possible that only Azalin himself could unmake his creation. The Crown was the symbol of all Darkon, and probably would be sought after by treasure hunters and would-be conquerors from all over the Land of Mists. Little do they know that the enchantments remain totally in force, perhaps now stronger than ever. ☠

THE CHIURGEON

A Clinical New Class for Ravenloft

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INTRODUCTION

The door of the Starless Night Tavern flew open with a force and suddenness that startled the bartender and his single patron. Lantern flames guttered as a stiff wind swirled through the room. The companions darted inside, carrying the limp and bloodied form of Tiberius.

The barkeep was quick to bellow a wordless sound of disapproval at their recklessness with his front door. His annoyance turned to thinly veiled contempt when he saw Gadriata.

“Hey,” he shouted, “We don’t serve Vistani in here!” His brow darkened even further when he noticed Allaroth’s pointed ears. “And get that changeling devil out of here!”

If the companions heard his growls, they didn’t respond. Instead they heaved the massive form of their wounded comrade onto a nearby table.

The man who had been sipping brandywine quietly at the bar turned urgently towards the companions, shooting the barkeep a cold glare. “Do all you Borcans have such cold hearts? Can’t you see their friend is injured?” He approached the group of newcomers, who huddled closely around Tiberius.

“What has happened here?” the stranger asked crisply.

Cassa, her face streaked with dirt, blood and tears, simply responded, “Please, sir. Is there a healer or church somewhere nearby? Say it is so!”

The stranger shook his head blankly, “I can’t say, my lady. I’m a stranger to this region myself.”

“You can’t bring that fellow in here!” insisted the barkeep, stepping from the behind the bar.

“Damn you filthy giorgio!” screamed Gadriata. She lunged towards him, drawing a thin, gleaming dagger. “Answer the question! A healer or a temple? Where?!”

The barkeep’s eyes grew wide, and he shuffled backwards awkwardly. “There’s nothing nearby!” he

stammered, visibly frightened. “It’s two miles to the outskirts of Levkarest!”

Allaroth, his lips pale and tight, glanced at his companions. “I might be able to make it with him in time. If I rode alone.”

“Not a chance.” The stranger spoke quietly, his eyes studying the ragged wounds in Tiberius’s throat, watching the warrior’s almost imperceptible breathing. “This man will die in minutes without proper attention. He should already be dead.”

“Then he is surely doomed,” spat Gadriata, tears in her eyes, “Our mystic has sapped her holy power this night already.”

“No,” replied the stranger calmly, removing his coatjacket. “He will not die, not if you do exactly what I tell you.”

The companions stared wordlessly as the gentleman produced a black case. He rapidly removed a selection of gleaming tools and carefully labeled vials. “Strip him to the waist,” the stranger barked, “But move him as little as possible. Cut and tear through that armor and clothing. One of you ladies take this cloth and soak up the blood as I work . . .”



“Will he be all right?” asked Gadriata. Tiberius lay pale and unmoving, but his breathing was steady.

“He’ll live,” replied the stranger, “At least long enough for your mystic to heal his wounds at tomorrow’s first light.” The man carefully cleaned Tiberius’ blood from his hands and instruments with a stained piece of cloth.

“Are you a physician, sir?” asked Cassa politely, “I’ve never seen such methods used. Did you attend university in Lamordia or Dementlieu?”

The stranger almost seemed to smile. “Not quite, my lady. My name is Arthur Folkstone. And if you don’t mind, I’d like to discuss my fee.”

The companions glanced at one another, uncertain that they had heard the man correctly. Allaroth was

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incredulous. “Fee, sir? Do you intend to extort our gold from us now that you have saved our comrade’s life?”

“Surely you don’t think such miracles come freely, do you?” replied Arthur with equal incredulity. “And it is not gold that I require, but your assistance. I am in need of a stalwart group such as yourselves to help me procure some materials from the Ezran hospice in Levkarest . . .”



Chiurgeon

Ability Requirements:	Dexterity 13 Intelligence 13
Prime Requisites:	Dexterity Intelligence
Races Allowed:	Human

The chiurgeon is a mercenary physician, a scientist in pursuit of fortune and research opportunities. His medical skill is as profound as his reputation is questionable. His controversial methods differ wildly from the simple first aid and herbalism practiced by folk healers and traditional physicians. The chiurgeon is no angel of mercy, however. He is devoted to biological knowledge, not service. The chiurgeon’s presence in an adventuring party is often a convenience, and his need for experimentation sometimes necessitates grave-robbing and other sinister practices.

Ability Requirements

A chiurgeon must have nimble, steady fingers for the delicate procedures she undertakes on the living and the dead. Because of her occasional clandestine activities, she must also be as stealthy as any burglar or cutpurse. Accordingly, a chiurgeon is required to have a Dexterity of at least 13. Rigorous academic study is required for a chiurgeon to absorb and synthesize the vast corpus of medical knowledge. Therefore, she must also have an Intelligence of 13. If a chiurgeon’s Dexterity and Intelligence scores are both 16 or better, she receives a 10% bonus to her experience points.

Chiurgeons advance in level as rogues.

Alignment

Many of Ravenloft’s traditional physicians are tradesman with an established shop, where they practice first aid, dentistry, barbering and herbalism. The chiurgeon is a shadier character, without any immediate desire to serve the masses. Rather, he is obsessed with furthering his understanding of life, and could justifiably be called self-interested. Player character chiurgeons must be lawful

neutral, true neutral, chaotic good or chaotic neutral. Chiurgeons of evil alignment do exist, and often become mad scientists of the likes of Victor Mordenheim and Frantisek Markov.

Arms and Armor

Most chiurgeons come from the upper classes, and have at least a gentlemanly training in the arts of war. Additionally, a chiurgeon often must tangle with dangerous individuals and unnatural creatures in their unsavory pursuits. Still, a chiurgeon views herself as a scientist first and foremost, and combat as a necessary hazard of last resorts. Accordingly, the weapon and armor selections of a chiurgeon resemble those of a thief. A chiurgeon may wear any nonmetal armor, with the exception of *elven chain mail*. She may not employ a shield, and her thieving abilities (see below) are hindered by any armor other than leather. Weapons to which a chiurgeon has access include the hand axe, club, crossbow, short bow, dagger, dart, knife, sling, staff, broad sword, long sword, rapier, and short sword.

Spells and Magical Items

Perhaps the greatest restriction imposed on chiurgeons is their inability to use any magical items. Despite the esoteric quality to his methods, the chiurgeon is a servant of science—at least in his own mind—and there is no place for magic in his studies. Most chiurgeons have at best a neutral view of the magical arts, regarding them as anything from an unrelated field of study to downright hokum. Some simply consider magic to be an outdated craft which does little to advance humanity’s understanding of the universe. A chiurgeon who outright denies the existence of magic often constructs elaborate theories to explain away his wizard companion’s *fireballs*. Chiurgeons may still benefit (and suffer) from the spells and magical items of others, however.

Thieving Skills

Though most chiurgeons would balk at the suggestion that they are criminals, their profession often requires them to employ the skills of the underworld. **Table 1: Chiurgeon Thieving Skill Base Scores** indicates the base percentage chance of success in these skills for a 1st-level chiurgeon.

Table 1: Chiurgeon Thieving Skill Base Scores	
Pick Pockets	15%

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Move Silently	5%
Hide in Shadows	5%
Read Languages	10%

The thieving skills of the chiurgeon are subject to modifiers based on Dexterity and armor, just like thieves (see **Tables 98-100** on pages 268-269 of *Domains of Dread*). After all adjustments have been made, a starting chiurgeon's player may allocate twenty points to his character's skills in any manner he sees fit. Each time a chiurgeon increases in experience level, he also gains fifteen points to further improve his skills. No skill may ever be raised beyond 95%.

Pick Pockets: Normally this ability reflects the cutpurse's talent for filching an unwary victim's purse. The chiurgeon, on the other hand, derives his skill with such deft manipulations from his experience with operation, vivisection and other delicate procedures where precision and efficiency are essential.

Move Silently and Hide in Shadows: The chiurgeon who finds himself slinking through a graveyard or morgue at midnight, dodging local constabulary, irate villagers and shambling undead learns to appreciate these skills.

Read Languages: A chiurgeon's studies in medicine often bring him into contact with the research and theory of numerous cultures. Unlike traditional physicians, chiurgeons are equally interested in the humour theory of the Core, Pharazian models of respiration, and the energy meridians of Rokushima Táiyo. Thus, a chiurgeon is often skilled at puzzling out the rough meaning of writing with which he is unfamiliar.

Backstab: In addition to the above skills, chiurgeons possess a talent for the quick, silent kill. This is based primarily on their knowledge of anatomy and their perchance for stealth, but many evil chiurgeons become practiced at backstabbing for the purpose of gathering fresh cadavers . . . Regardless, a chiurgeon may backstab in a manner identical to a thief of the same level, and uses the standard damage modifiers (see **Table 103** on page 271 of *Domains of Dread*).

Expert Diagnosis

If the chiurgeon's medical skills have an immediate application, it is surely the analysis of human illness, injury and death. By making a simple Intelligence check, modified by circumstances as the Dungeon Master deems appropriate, the chiurgeon can make just about any medical diagnosis. Most diseases, poisons, injuries, conditions, parasites and causes of death can all be determined through a chiurgeon's diagnosis. Magical diseases and afflictions can even be determined, if a chiurgeon has prior experience or accurate knowledge of

the symptoms. Such an analysis assumes that the chiurgeon can perform a careful, deliberate study to arrive at a logical conclusion, and if the chiurgeon is pressed for time, the Dungeon Master should feel free to impose penalties. Conversely, if the chiurgeon has access to superior medical equipment and supplies, the Dungeon Master could award a bonus to the roll. Though such diagnoses are useful in determining a course of action, it does not immediately provide detailed information on a cure.

The Healing Arts

The chiurgeon practices bizarre techniques for healing injury that confound orthodox physicians and folk healers alike. Some sages whisper that it is the Mists themselves that grant curative properties to the chiurgeon's unconventional practices. Chiurgeon healing techniques include not only basic first aid, but also application of needles, synthetic chemicals, metal clamps, vibrations, and even electrical current. Regardless of the nature of the chiurgeon's abilities, the results are impressive, as wounds heal with almost supernatural speed under their ministrations.

A chiurgeon's healing ability functions much like a superior version of the healing proficiency. A successful Intelligence check is required for the chiurgeon to successfully utilize his healing arts. The chiurgeon must also have access to his medical kit (see *Tools of the Art*, below). If a chiurgeon can tend to another character's injuries within one round of wounding, he can heal 1d4+2 points of damage. Older wounds can also be tended, but in this case the chiurgeon only heals 1d3+1 points of damage. In both cases, the chiurgeon also heals an additional amount of damage based on his level (see **Table 2: Chiurgeon Healing Bonus**). A single individual can only be tended by a chiurgeon once per day, but a chiurgeon's ability to tend to others is unlimited (or, more realistically, limited only by materials and time).

Chiurgeon's Level	1-4	5-8	9-12	13-16	17+
Ex. HP Healed	0	+1	+2	+3	+4

Bleeding

Chiurgeons have a peculiar method for dealing with diseases and poisons, from which their appellation is derived. They employ living leeches—or, more rarely, a simple scalpel—to drain a small amount of blood from critical points on the body. The process is slow, however, and is not easily carried out under duress. The patient must remain lying down and motionless while bleeding is

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carried out. In order to begin, the chiurgeon must make a successful Intelligence check and then inflict 1 point of damage on the patient. Every three rounds, the patient takes one additional point of damage. At the end of each round, the patient can make a 1d100 curative check, with a chance of success equal to 1% multiplied by twice the number of rounds spent bleeding. For example, if the patient is bled for 14 rounds, the chance of success is 28%. Success means that the disease or poison has been completely purged from the patient's system. The chiurgeon can stop the bleeding at any time. A character who loses more than 50% of her hit points (rounded down) to bleeding must save vs. death magic or faint for 1d12 turns. A character who loses more than 80% of her hit points must save vs death magic or slip into an anemic coma for 1d4 days. Bleeding cannot cure magical diseases such as lycanthropy or mummy rot, but can cure the effects of a *cause disease* spell and magical viruses (see "Virus" in the *RAVENLOFT MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix III*). A chiurgeon cannot cure damage done through bleeding with his healing ability.

Surgery and Transplants

In addition to healing injury and curing disease, a chiurgeon is capable of undertaking invasive surgery to heal conditions, or even to replace lost organs. A chiurgeon must have at least her medical kit and a lightning flask (see Tools of the Art, below) to perform such complex procedures. Access to a fully equipped laboratory provides a +2 bonus to the chiurgeon's Intelligence rolls (see below).

Blindness and Deafness: It is possible for a chiurgeon to actually cure physical blindness or deafness through surgery. First, the chiurgeon must make a successful Intelligence check. The roll's result indicates the number of hours that the surgery requires. Each hour of surgery requires that the chiurgeon make a successful Dexterity check. A failure indicates that the chiurgeon has botched the operation; he may not attempt to operate on that particular patient again until he increases in level. A 20 on a Dexterity roll indicates that the chiurgeon has forever ruined any chance of the patient being cured. If the chiurgeon manages to successfully negotiate all his Dexterity checks, the patient's vision or hearing is fully restored! The patient receives anesthesia for the procedure, but must make a Constitution check or lose 1d6x10% of her hit points. These hit points can only be healed through time or magic. Surgery cannot cure magical blindness or deafness.

Transplants: This procedure is much more difficult and carries greater risk. Fingers, toes, feet, hands, eyes, legs or arms may all be reattached to an unfortunate individual who has had such an organ removed or destroyed. The transplanted organ can even come from

another individual, as long as that individual is the same gender and species. Regardless, the organ must have been removed from a living being less than twenty-four hours, and it must be packed in cold, moist cloth (or ice if possible). The patient, however, need not have lost the organ recently, if one from another individual is being used in the transplant.

The system is similar to that described above. The chiurgeon must make an Intelligence check, with appropriate modifiers as described in **Table 3: Transplant Intelligence Check Modifiers**. The difference indicates the number of hours the surgery will require, and the chiurgeon must make a successful Dexterity check every hour. The patient must make a Constitution check or lose 1d6x10% of her hit points, modified as shown in **Table 4: Transplant Damage Modifiers** (yes, she might die)! Finally, the patient must make a save vs. death magic and *fail*. A successful save indicates that the patient's body has rejected the organ. If this occurs, the attached organ is useless. If the save vs. death is failed, however, the new organ functions just as the patient's originally did! This procedure must be undertaken independently for each organ being replaced. Thus, a patient who has lost both his eyes would have to undergo two separate surgeries.

Every three hours since organ was removed (round up)	-1
Organ packed in cold, moist cloth	+2
Organ packed in ice	+4
Organ from another individual	-4

Organ Transplanted	Mod. to 1d6x10% roll
Finger or Toe	None
Hand or Foot	+1
Eye	+2
Leg or Arm	+4

Trepanning

Most chiurgeons believe that insanity is not itself a condition, but a symptom of internal cranial pressure resulting from mental trauma. The direct and rather horrifying solution to such a malediction is a process known as trepanning. For those who are willing to take the risks, trepanning can be a rapid cure for even the most debilitating madness. The possible consequences, however, are severe, as the patient can become an imbecile, or even descend further into dementia.

In trepanning, the chiurgeon physically drills into the skull of the afflicted individual. The intent is to relieve

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the swelling or drain the fluid that is believed to be causing the madness. The drilling process inflicts 1d2 points of damage each round. It has a cumulative percentage chance of immediately curing the madness equal to 5% multiplied by the number of rounds spent drilling. Unfortunately, there is an equal chance that the patient loses 1d6 points of Intelligence. Both percentage rolls are performed at the end of each round of drilling. The curative roll is modified by +1% per level of the chiurgeon and three points of the victim's Constitution (rounded down). The brain damage roll is likewise modified by -1%. The possibility of brain damage can never decrease below 1%.

Example: *Nicholai, a 3rd-level chiurgeon, is attempting to use trepanning on Anthony, who is suffering from schizophrenia. Anthony has a Constitution of 13. Nicholai begins drilling, and at the end of the first round Anthony makes a curative roll and a brain damage roll. The curative roll has a base chance of 5%, modified by +3% for Nicholai's level and +4% for Anthony's Constitution, for a total of 12%. The brain damage roll has a base chance of 5%, modified by -3% for Nicholai's level and -4% for Anthony's Constitution, for a total of 1%. The drilling inflicts two points of damage on Anthony, but both rolls fail. Nicholai decides to continue the trepanning process. The next round, the curative roll is 17% (10+3+4=17) and the brain damage roll is 3% (10-3-4=3). Again, Anthony takes damage and both rolls fail. Nicholai elects to keep drilling...*

Regardless of the outcome, the patient always loses one permanent point of Intelligence when the procedure is complete. He must also make a percentage roll with a chance of failure equal to 1% multiplied by the number of rounds spent drilling. A failure indicate that the patient suffers the effects of a failed madness check (see **Table 9: Failed Madness Check Results** in *Domains of Dread*).

The Necessity of Research

A chiurgeon does not cease her explorations of the human body when she ventures out into the world. On the contrary, chiurgeons lead the life they do in order to discover unique research opportunities. In order to advance in level, a chiurgeon must vivisect a number of fresh adult humans cadavers equal to her current level. Thus, a 3rd-level chiurgeon must perform three vivisections before she can advance to 4th level. These autopsies may be conducted at any time, but the chiurgeon will not advance in level until she has performed them, no matter how many experience points she has obtained. This is more of a logistical and roleplaying challenge than an actual hindrance to level advancement, but a chiurgeon character may quickly discover that procuring fresh cadavers is quite difficult. The beliefs and practices of the local domain, as well as

the willingness of the chiurgeon's companions, determine just how difficult. Powers checks may even be appropriate if the chiurgeon is particularly amoral about obtaining her "research materials" . . .

Tools of the Art

The physician's path requires not only an extensive education, but also a significant amount of wealth for basic supplies. Thus, most chiurgeons are from the upper or noble classes. Poorer folk simply cannot afford to follow such a calling. Chiurgeons, despite their somewhat outcast status from the orthodox medical world, have at least some initial financing for their education and tools. To reflect this, regardless of their starting wealth, a chiurgeon character always receives a leechcraft kit at character creation. The character need not spend any money to purchase this kit. Nonetheless, many of the kit's components will need to be replenished. **A good rule of thumb is that a leechcraft kit requires 50 gp worth of additional supplies once per month.**

The items below are rare in the extreme, and will not normally be available even in healer's shops or apothecaries. Other chiurgeons must be sought out to purchase such goods, or the chiurgeon must have the skills and facilities necessary to construct them himself.

Leechcraft Kit

Cost: 1,000 gp

The leechcraft kit consists of a large black leather case, equipped with sturdy handles and a metal clasp. It contains normal medical supplies, such as scalpels, knives, saws, bandages, lenses, ether, needles and thread, and mundane salves and ointments. It also has stranger tools with purposes running from the obvious to the unimaginable: jars of live leeches, long golden needles, wooden funnels and cups, tuning forks, drills and augers, vials of distilled chemicals, clamps, tubes and hoses, alcohol lamps, and all manner of strange things.

Lightning Flask

Cost: 75 gp

This curious device is often used by chiurgeons to heal injuries more rapidly, and is essential in surgery or transplants. The flask resembles a thick glass bottle attached transversely to a metal rod, terminating in a heavy metal sphere two inches in diameter. An extendible probe is encased in the sphere, and the sphere is normally kept covered with a rubber sheath. The flask contains glands extracted from electric eels, coils of metals wire and a precisely calibrated electrolyte solution. The flask requires daily maintenance to function correctly, and a weekly change of solution. Additionally,

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the flask become useless in three months, and the tissue and mechanics must all be replaced at a cost of 40 gp.

The flask functions by creating a mild electrical current in the metal sphere. If the sphere (or the probe for particularly delicate procedures) is applied to a wound in a precise manner, it speeds up regeneration of the tissues. A chiurgeon working with a lightning flask has a +2 bonus to his Intelligence check when healing, and restores an extra point of damage with each application. The flask is useless in the hands of anyone but a chiurgeon, however.

Plaguemask

Cost: 10 gp.

A plaguemask is often utilized by chiurgeons working in areas with a high risk of disease, such as villages struck by plagues. They are also useful in places like crypts and sewers, where interlopers might contract diseases from the surroundings. The mask consists of a close-fitting leather hood with a long, hollow “nose” protruding from the front. This chamber is filled with aromatic and medicinal herbs that must be replaced daily (1 sp), and is perforated with tiny holes at the end for ventilation. The wearer sees through large eyeholes covered in thick glass. Though many mock chiurgeons for employing such a ridiculous piece of attire, the reality is that a chiurgeon rarely becomes ill while wearing it (85% “resistance” to airborne infectious diseases *before* any applicable saving throw). An individual wearing a plaguemask has a -4 penalty to her surprise rolls, however, as her hearing and peripheral vision are severely impaired.

Domains

Churgeon heroes may hail from Borca, Dementlieu, Invidia, Lamordia, Mordent, Necropolis, Nosos, Paridon, Richemulot or Souragne.



ABBER NOMADS

Player Character Kits from the Nightmare Lands

by Andrew Hauptman

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INTRODUCTION

Abber nomads are a strange and primitive people who wander the Nightmare Lands in relative safety. They have been described in great detail in the *RAVENLOFT MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendices I & II* and *The Nightmare Lands* boxed set, but this article presents the information from these products so players can create and play Abber player characters in their campaigns. One character type is presented as a kit for fighters, the other as a specialty priest unique to the Demiplane of Dread. For those who do not have access to the published products listed above, a brief summary of Abber society and the roles of these character is provided.

Abber Society

The Abber people are the only true humans native to the Nightmare Lands. They speak their own unique language which is totally unlike any other human or humanoid tongue. The Abber nomads dwell in an area known as the Forest of Everchange, which only occasionally is in fact a forest. The landform changes suddenly and regularly, reality shifting without warning. This is the only reality the Abber have ever known, and it colors their perceptions and their philosophy dramatically.

Because the world as they know it has a mutable reality, the Abber believe that only what they can perceive at the given moment is real. Anything else simply does not exist (at least at that moment). They have memories and will remember encountering individuals they have met previously, but as far as the Abber are concerned, other people do not exist except during those times when they are present and the Abber people are able to see, hear, and touch them. This unique perception applies to anything and everything besides the individual, so even fellow Abber only exist when direct perception is possible! A common greeting among the Abber is “I am glad that you are being.” Abber Nomads embody the philosophy of “out of sight, out of mind.”

Because of the random, chaotic nature of their immediate reality, Abber have no concept of cause and effect. The laws of nature, physics, and magic can change from one moment to the next, so the Abber have adopted this understanding in order to adapt to and roll with the changes in the environment. In the Nightmare Lands you might be able to produce a fire one day by rubbing two sticks together, but the next day it might be necessary to soak wood with water to set it aflame. Thus, traditional notions of cause and effect are lost on the Abber people.

Oddly enough, the Abber people never dream. This adaptation probably accounts for their continued survival in the Nightmare Lands. In addition, Abber never suffer mental fatigue or insanity from their lack of dreams. Perhaps their unique psychology accounts for their ability to remain sane without dreaming. However, some Abber are able to learn how to *dreamwalk* (see below).

There are no wizards among the Abber nomads, but a very few of them become Abber Shamans, unique specialty priests found only in the Nightmare Lands. Abber Shamans seek to embrace and understand the madness of their world instead of passively accepting it as their fellow Abber nomads do. These beliefs are considered insane by the Abber people, who force their shamans to live as solitary outcasts from their own people, mainly because the shamans draw the unwanted attentions of the Nightmare Court (the unearthly rulers of the Nightmare Lands).

Abber Nomad Warrior

Classes Allowed:

Fighter, Ranger

Races Allowed:

Human, Half-elf

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Alignments Allowed: Any
Ability Requirements: Strength 10+
Constitution 12+
Prime Requisite: Constitution

Description

Abber Nomad warriors are the defenders of the primitive Abber people. They are taller than the average human (most are over 6 feet tall) and well-muscled. They wear their hair long and wear clothing made from the skins of the strange animals they hunt and slay in the Nightmare Lands. They often wear the feathers and teeth of these creatures as jewelry and headdresses.

All known Abber Nomad warriors are humans or half-elves, and the latter are exceedingly rare among the Abber people). While it might be possible for a demihuman or humanoid creature to be adopted into the tribe at infancy, it seems unlikely that the Abber would bother to do so, since any creatures other than Abber Nomads have, to their eyes, only a transitory existence.

Role

Abber Nomad warriors are hunters and gatherers for their people, a dangerous occupation at best in the ever-changing Nightmare lands. The Abber are a fairly close-knit people and tend to have little or no interest in outsiders who probably don't exist anyhow. Thus Abber Nomad warrior heroes are extremely rare, for few would take enough interest in non-Abbers to want to join them for any length of time. Heroes are usually characters who have become separated from their kin or seen them killed by some bizarre disaster or monstrous attack. Unless he is reunited with his people, the character will do whatever is necessary to survive, including joining non-Abber groups. Alternately, a Abber Nomad warrior hero could be the rare individual who shows an unusual interest in other people, perhaps even befriending them. They would still be limited by their unique perceptions of reality, and thus unable to make any long-term plans.

Secondary Skills

Fisher, Forester, Hunter, or Trapper/Furrier.

Weapon Proficiencies

Abber Nomads must learn the use of the stone javelin (not balanced for throwing, ranges are reduced by half) and the short bow. They can only gain proficiency in primitive weapons unless they encounter more advanced weaponry in their travels.

Nonweapon Proficiencies

Available Categories: By Class.

Required: Endurance, Survival.

Recommended: Animal Handling, Animal Training, Bowyer/Fletcher, Cooking, Direction Sense, Fire-building, Fishing, Herbalism, Hunting, Languages (Modern), Mountaineering, Riding (Land-based), Swimming, Tracking.

Equipment

Wanderers by nature, the Abber Nomads usually own no more than they can carry themselves or with pack animals; even their shelters (*tipis*) are portable. Abber Nomads are limited to primitive weapons and tools, but character who leave the Nightmare Lands can equip themselves with more advanced materials as they encounter them. Abbers wear tanned skins (AC 9) and carry wooden shields for protection. They wear feathers and some beaded jewelry, and paint their faces and bodies with traditional symbols to give themselves power over their enemies.

Special Benefits

Because they live in an insane land of chaos and uncertainty, Abber Nomads have developed a natural 25% immunity to all manner of illusions and hallucinations. Even if this immunity fails, they still receive a +4 bonus to saving throws against these effects. They also have a 5% resistance to all other mind-affecting spells, and are additionally immune to all spells that affect dreams.

In addition, Abber Nomads with the Herbalism nonweapon proficiency know how to manufacture a mild poison (Class C, 2-5 minutes, 25/2d4) which they use to coat their arrowheads when hunting large or dangerous animals.

Special Hindrances

Abber Nomad warriors have successfully adjusted to life in a land where madness and random change are the only rules. When outside the Nightmare Lands (any place where the normal laws of cause and effect apply), Abber Nomads receive a -4 penalty to all Intelligence, Wisdom, and nonweapon proficiency rolls. They are also unable to consider matters that are not an immediate part of their environment (remember, if they can't see it, it doesn't exist), which may lead to some interesting role-playing conflicts with other heroes. They can consider such matters hypothetically, but will firmly believe that any threats outside their immediate perception simply do not exist at this time.

Wealth Options

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Abber Nomad Warriors “purchase” equipment as if they received the usual 5d4 gp for starting money, but start with no money as currency is not used in their tribe. Any extra unspent “money” is lost. The hero can acquire money later on but must first be taught the purpose of currency, and then be shown how to use it.

Abber Shaman

Classes Allowed:	Specialty Priest <i>Unknown Power of the Nightmare Lands</i>
Portfolio:	<i>Dreams, dreamscapes, reality</i>
Races Allowed:	Human
Alignments Allowed:	Neutral
Ability Requirements:	Wisdom 15+ Strength 12+ Constitution 13+
Prime Requisite:	Wisdom
Weapons Allowed:	Any primitive weapons made of either wood or bone
Armor Allowed:	Leather or hide
Major Spheres:	All, Astral, Divination, Healing, Summoning, Time, Travelers
Minor Spheres:	Creation, Guardian, Necromantic, Protection, Thought, Wards
Magic Items Allowed:	Same as clerics

Granted Powers

- ❖ Abber shamans gain all of the special benefits that Abber Nomad warriors possess, including spell immunities (see above).
- ❖ Abber shamans who have the herbalism proficiency can manufacture the mild poison used by Abber Nomad Warriors (described above).
- ❖ Abber shamans cannot turn undead. Instead, they have the ability to *banish dream spawn* (shape-changing creatures detailed in *The Nightmare Lands* boxed set; at the Dungeon Master’s option this can extend to other dream-related creatures such as bastelli). Use the Hit Dice portion of the Turning Undead table from *Domains of Dread* to determine a shaman’s chances of banishing a dream spawn. A “D” result not only drives a dream spawn off, but forces it to revert to its natural form if it is disguised. If the dream creature was draining a victim in the waking world, it will forever be unable to feed on that victim again with a successful turning attempt.
- ❖ At 3rd level, an Abber shaman can *detect dream spawn*. This ability allows the shaman to determine if an individual is a dreamer (someone whose mind is wandering the Nightmare Lands while their body is

asleep), a wanderer (someone who physically enters the Nightmare Lands) or a dream spawn. The base chance of success is 25% plus 2% per level of the shaman. The shaman can also know the strengths and weaknesses of a dream spawn that he or she encounters, base chance 10% plus 2% per level.

- ❖ At 7th level an Abber shaman gains the knowledge and skill to create a magic item known as a *dreamcatcher*. See the notes below for the functioning of this special item.
- ❖ At 9th level the Abber shaman gains the power of *dreamwalking*. By entering a deep trance he or she can send their dream-self into the dreams of those sleeping in the waking world. The character must make a successful Wisdom check with a -4 penalty to successfully *dreamwalk*. This power can be used once per day. The trance lasts for 1 turn per level of the shaman. During the trance the shaman’s physical body sits helpless and is vulnerable to any dangers that come upon it.

Other Notes

Only humans can be Abber shamans. Consult the Abber Nomad Warrior kit for guidelines on equipment and wealth options (shamans get 3d6 x 10 for “starting gold”).

Dreamcatchers

A *dreamcatcher* is a wooden staff topped by a circle of woven vines, straw and feathers arranged in a mystic pattern. The Abber shaman (or other wanderers) can safely exit a dreamscape through a nether portal (a type of magical gate; see *The Nightmare Lands* boxed set for details) and arrive wherever they want to go. To navigate a nether portal, a character normally has to roll a Wisdom check with a -8 penalty. When using a *dreamcatcher*, only a straight Wisdom check is required. Safe destinations can only be located in the Forest of Everchange in the Terrain Between. No other destinations can be reached by this method.



THE INQUISITOR

A New Priest Class for Ravenloft

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INTRODUCTION

As a young acolyte rapped politely on the Sentire's door, Inquisitor Grimsted waited patiently a measured distance away. A murmured reply came from within, and the door creaked open gently. With a visible nervousness, the acolyte bowed awkwardly and took his leave, walking away perhaps a bit too swiftly.

Inquisitor Grimsted drew himself up and veritably drifted into the Sentire's chambers. He was aware of the effect an Inquisitor could have even on a respected priest of the faith. Although he did not consider himself a manipulator by any stretch of the imagination, the Inquisitor felt that obtaining complete cooperation from a local temple sometimes necessitated playing the part that others expected. That meant being commanding and dramatic, but reserved. One had to have an aura, a fearful air of judgment. Sometimes, it made the difference between success and failure.

Glimpsing Sentire Molina for the first time in the dim light of his private chambers, Inquisitor Grimsted knew that he was not a man who was easily intimidated. The Sentire's eyes showed visible aggravation, but no fear, no guilt. The junior anchorite who was also present reacted more obviously. Her hands were trembling ever so slightly, and her dark eyes flicked to the silver sword amulet that the Inquisitor wore around his neck. Unlike the symbol that she and Molina wore, Grimsted's did not include a shield.

Grimsted bowed deeply before Molina. "Your Eminence. It is an honor to be in the presence of the esteemed Sentire of Karg." He stepped forward to kiss Molina's signet ring, and noted that the Sentire did not rise from his chair.

"I am likewise honored to be graced by your presence, Holy Inquisitor. Your reputation precedes you. This is Mother Lavaur. I am deeply sorry that our introduction had to be delayed until after Vespers. It was quite rude of me."

Grimsted bowed to Lavaur and raised a dismissive palm. "Think nothing of it, Your Eminence. It gave me a chance to become acclimated to the soul of the city. I have already gotten a sense of the dark shadow that has fallen over Karg."

The Sentire glanced at Mother Lavaur and then smiled very slightly at Grimsted. It was an expression of bemused condescension, like one might give a child who insists he has seen a dragon. "Indeed. But then Karg has always been plagued by shadow. The Kargat and the Eternal Order squeeze the people in a vise of terror. These recent murders have only compounded the problem, regardless of their possible cause." Molina said these last two words with thinly veiled contempt.

"Then you are aware of why I am here," replied the Inquisitor. "The presence of a nosferatu is not to be taken lightly. Its evil is far fouler than that of any corrupt enforcers or rival faith."

"Yes." Molina looked at Grimsted severely. "I take it you have a plan of action?"

"The prescribed measures, as usual." Grimsted spoke quietly, as if speaking of a great secret. "I will require the services of your scribes, and a personal assistant who knows the city well. However, your anchorites will not need to escort me as I go about my duties."

Molina raised an eyebrow, and Mother Lavaur spoke for the first time. "Oh? Do you plan to hunt this beast in his lair without steel?" Her tone was almost mocking, but a withering glance from Grimsted instantly made her regret that she had taken it.

"No. I have employed a group of adventurers with whom I have worked in the past in similar instances. They will provide all the protection to my person that I require, and they do it much more willingly at that."

Molina did not appear fazed by the remark.

"Adventurers? How resourceful of you. Who are they?"

"Their band includes a warrior, mystic, gypsy, woodsman and scientist. Very capable. Experienced monster slayers." Grimsted noted that Molina had wanted to know their identities. He also noted that his

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own evasiveness had prompted a hint of irritation in the Sentire's eyes.

"It was an honor to finally meet you, Your Eminence," said the Inquisitor, "but I must be about my duties, and I imagine that you have your own responsibilities to attend to before Compline. If my guide could be at the temple gates at dawn?"

"Absolutely." Mother Lavaur rose to open the door for Grimsted as the Sentire asked, "And I trust you will keep me abreast of your progress, Holy Inquisitor?"

Grimsted smiled. "Absolutely." He briskly turned on his heel, and swept out of the room.

As the door shut, the Sentire glanced languidly at Mother Lavaur. She glared back at him fiercely. "He suspects, Samuel."

He chuckled dully at her expense. "He suspects nothing, Henriette. He's a fool on an equally foolish crusade. What were the Bastions thinking, I wonder, when they decreed the Inquisition? That these priests would somehow better the Church? That it would emerge purer after their ministrations? I think not. They have silken tongues and nimble minds, these Inquisitors, true. But their vision is clouded by numb conviction and a preposterous belief in their own infallibility."

"What are we going to do?" Lavaur was pacing now, obviously shaken. "He may be foolish, but he's tenacious. I've heard stories about this one. And you know what they say about the Inquisition. They say they can see right through lies . . ."

"Calm yourself, my dear." Molina poured himself a drink from an earthenware carafe. "You become so easily agitated sometimes, honestly. Remember who you are. He is nothing to us. To react otherwise is to fall victim to the delusions of your lessers."

The Sentire sipped thoughtfully from his goblet as he gazed out the window at the winking stars. As he ran his tongue delicately over his crimson-stained fangs, Molina thought of how close Grimsted might get to the truth, and how soon the Inquisitor would have to die.



Inquisitor

Ability Requirements:

Intelligence 13

Wisdom 13

Charisma 9

Prime Requisites:

Wisdom

Races Allowed:

Human

An inquisitor is a priest who devotes himself to defending his church against its enemies. Unlike the militant cleric, however, the inquisitor's place is not the battlefield. Rather, the inquisitor must be an investigator, scholar and judge. Most of all, he must be an individual of supreme personal will. Almost all lawful faiths in the Demiplane of Dread retain inquisitors, but their duties vary depending on the ethos of their parent church. Typical responsibilities include rooting out heresy, investigating crimes, resolving internal problems, and destroying the creatures of the night. Service to the masses is the duty of the local priest; the inquisitor's responsibility is the integrity of the church as a whole. Depending on the circumstances, the common folk may feel elation or terror at an inquisitor's arrival in their village.

Ability Requirements

Perhaps more than ordinary priests, inquisitors are known for their sagacity. An inquisitor must have a Wisdom score of at least 13. An inquisitor with a Wisdom of 16 or better receives a 10% bonus to any experience points she earns. Additionally, an inquisitor must have a discerning and knowledgeable mind; many are well-versed in theology, politics, law, logic and the occult. To reflect this, an inquisitor must have an Intelligence of at least 13. And although they are not necessarily warm and friendly individuals, inquisitors must be able to deal smoothly with a variety of people and social situations. The success of their inquiries often depends on it. Therefore, inquisitors must have a Charisma of at least 9.

Alignment

Inquisitors believe that structure and adherence to standards are necessary for the survival of the faith. By definition, they are devoted to preventing the eruption of chaos in their church. As such, all inquisitors must be of lawful alignment. Inquisitor player characters must be either lawful good or lawful neutral. Lawful evil inquisitors do exist. The foul Church of Bane, for instance, has a large contingent of such ruthless priests.

Arms and Armor

Unlike a cleric, an inquisitor is not a priest of the battlefield. This is not to say that an inquisitor cannot defend himself. On the contrary, many a creature of the night has found that an inquisitor can be quite deadly, for they combine a cunning knowledge of the supernatural with a willingness to die in the defense of their church. Still, compared to the cleric, the inquisitor is much more limited in his selection of weapons and armor. Inquisitors

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may only wear padded, leather or studded leather armor, and may not utilize shields. Weapons available to the inquisitor include the club, dagger, dart, knife, quarterstaff, scourge, sling and whip. Many inquisitors are proficient at hurling flasks and other grenade-type weapons as well, for holy water and burning oil can be invaluable in the fight against the minions of darkness.

Spells and Magical Items

Inquisitors have major access to the spheres of All, Charm, Divination, Healing, Law, Protection, Thought and Wards. They have minor access to the spheres of Necromantic, Numbers and Time. Inquisitors may utilize any magical items normally available to priests.

Turn Undead

Like many priests, inquisitors possess the power to repel or even destroy the undead through their faith. An inquisitor may turn undead in a manner identical to a cleric of equivalent level (see **Table 91: Turning Undead** in *Domains of Dread* pg. 264).

Worldly Knowledge

Inquisitors often must acquire a great deal of knowledge about a variety of topics. Besides being theological experts in their own faiths, they easily learn sinister or unusual skills. All inquisitors receive the religion nonweapon proficiency at character creation, without having to spend a slot on it. In addition, an inquisitor may purchase any of the following nonweapon proficiencies without paying the extra slot penalty for proficiencies outside their racial or class group: disguise, forgery, spellcraft and tracking. Dungeon Masters may also allow other proficiencies to be purchased without penalty, particularly those only available to rogues or wizards.

Ecclesiastic Authority

Unlike clerics or other priests, inquisitors have inherent status by virtue of their office. Their power comes directly from the highest authority in their church. In a sense, they exist in a separate order outside of the traditional clergy. This is not to say that an inquisitor outranks all the “ordinary” priests in his church; a 5th-level inquisitor is still considered the inferior of 7th-level cleric. Rather, local churches will always do whatever the inquisitor requires to make his holy mission easier. The inquisitor will be fed, clothed, healed and sheltered if needed. He can request that the temple’s clerics assist in martial matters, or demand organizational tasks that the local temple might be able to perform better than he. The inquisitor will *not* be freely provided with equipment or

wealth, which are his own responsibility. In some instances, the local clerics may even be secretly hostile to the inquisitor for political or theological reasons. However, an inquisitor who finds a temple uncooperative can inform the church’s authorities of the friction, which will reflect poorly on the locals in time. Additionally, lying to an inquisitor is considered a grave offense. A priest (and sometimes a layperson) who is caught lying to an inquisitor is often punished quite severely, although rarely by the inquisitor himself.

Piercing Illusions

One of the most legendary abilities of inquisitors is their facility for seeing through illusions. The inquisitor’s deity directly grants them the ability to discern reality from deception. An inquisitor has a base 5% chance to see through any illusion, modified by +5% for each experience level of the inquisitor and -5% for each level of the spell in question. For example, an 8th-level inquisitor would have a 25% chance of piercing a 3rd-level illusion.

Granted Abilities

As an inquisitor advances in level, he receives several special powers to enable him to oppose the church’s enemies more effectively:

- ❖ At 3rd level, the inquisitor gains the ability to use *ESP* once per day, as the 2nd-level wizard spell.
- ❖ At 5th level, the inquisitor gains the ability to use *detect lie* once per day, as the 4th-level priest spell.
- ❖ At 9th level, a subject of the inquisitor’s *detect lie* ability is no longer allowed to make a saving throw.
- ❖ At 11th level, the inquisitor gains the ability to use *legend lore* once per day, as the 6th-level wizard spell.
- ❖ At 15th level, the inquisitor gains the ability to use *banishment* once per day, as the 7th-level wizard spell.

Level Advancement

Inquisitors advance in level as anchorites (see **Table 89: Priest Level Advancement** in *Domains of Dread* pg. 262)

A Note on Faiths

Any lawful faith can conceivably have inquisitors in its ranks. In Ravenloft, almost all inquisitors belong to either the Church of Ezra or the Church of Bane. Not only are these relatively prominent Core religions, but the flavor of the class best fits with these two faiths.

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Inquisitors from other faiths are possible, depending on the preferences of the Dungeon Master. Some suggestions: G'Hennan inquisitors devoted to Zhakata the Provider; Sri Rajin inquisitors devoted to Brihaspati, Mitra, Surya, Ushas, Varuna or Yama; and Rokushima Táiyoo inquisitors devoted to Hachiman, Izanagi and Izanami or Nai No Kami.

An additional option is to open the inquisitor class to dwarves, gnomes and halflings who are devoted to particular demihuman deities. Dungeon Masters should be very careful about allowing this latter possibility. Not only is the inquisitor mindset an unusual one for demihumans to assume, but the worship of such racial deities is very rare in the Demiplane of Dread (or perhaps nonexistent). Possible demihuman faiths include: dwarves devoted to Berronar Truesilver, Clangeddin Silverbeard or Moradin; gnomes devoted to Gaerdal Ironhand or Garl Glittergold; and halflings devoted to Arvoreen, Cyrrollalee or Yondalla.

Domains

Borca, Dementlieu, Falkovnia, Hazlan, Invidia, Kartakass, Mordent, Necropolis, Nova Vaasa, Richemulot, Valachan. Also possibly G'Henna, Rokushima Táiyoo or Sri Raji.



THE FREAK KIT

Sideshow Heroes

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INTRODUCTION

It's all right for you to stare at me—I'm quite used to it by now. If you had a hunched back and a huge, wart-covered nose, I'd stare at you too. But don't think that I'm some kind of monster just because I look like one. Gregori the Bent may juggle clubs for your entertainment, but in my spare time I read the classics of literature, and compose poems that have been well-received by the literary community—as long as they remain anonymous, that is. So laugh at me if you wish, but don't try to judge me just for my looks. As they say, appearances are deceiving.

With the release of the *Carnival* accessory by John W. Mangrum and Steve Miller, it seems more than appropriate to offer a new character kit that can be used with that product. This kit can be used as an alternative to the Twisting rules presented in *Carnival*, or to create a prodigy from one of Ravenloft's other, less notable traveling sideshows. Ultimately, however, this kit is available for any player who wants to create a bard who does *not* get rave reviews! Enjoy!

Role

Stunted limbs, bloated bodies and distorted faces, hunched backs and gruesome mutations—these are the marks of the Freak. There is no uniform appearance among these twisted, tortured souls, only the despair and loneliness that come from an ugliness that defies human comparison.

Most Freaks haunt *Carnival* and the other circus sideshows that pass for entertainment in the Demiplane of Dread, entertaining the masses much like other carnival performers. Freaks are cursed with some hideous deformity that disturbs or frightens people in public, but fascinates them when the stage puts the Freak at a safe distance. Few people are enlightened enough to see past the Freak's ugly appearance to find the soul of the artist underneath. As a result, most Freaks live lonely, solitary

lives, with only the company of their fellow Freaks and a few kindly circus folk to ease their pain. If encountered alone in normal society, a Freak would be ignored at best, and hunted down as a monster at worst. Most Freaks would rather seek the safety and security of the big top. This kit represents only those who have chosen the performing lifestyle (i.e. bards).

Qualifications

Freaks do not have the standard ability score requirements of bards. Instead, they must have at least three extreme ability scores, which are either above 15 or below 7 (at least one of each). Note that a Freak's high Charisma score (if any) reflects his social skill, not the character's appearance.

Secondary Skills

None.

Weapon Proficiencies

Freaks can start play with proficiencies in weapons commonly used in shows or carried by circus hands. These include swords, clubs, whips, lassos, staves, and throwing knives among others. After 1st level, the Freak may become proficient with any weapon he or she had the opportunity to learn. Some weapons may be impossible for a Freak to wield due to the nature of his or her mutation.

Nonweapon Proficiencies

Bonus: Begging, plus one performing proficiency from the following list: Dancing, Juggling, Musical Instrument, Poetry, Singing, Tightrope Walking, Tumbling.

Recommended: Animal Handling, Animal Training, Artistic Ability, Carpentry, Disguise, Etiquette, Jumping, Reading/Writing, plus any of the performing proficiencies listed above.

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Armor & Equipment

Freaks own very few personal possessions aside from torn, tattered clothing. They may have a few juggling props or an old, worn-out musical instrument. The character cannot start play at 1st level with more than 3 gp; any excess funds must be spent or given away. After starting play the Freak character may save and spend money as he or she wishes.

If a Freak's deformity is severe enough, it will be difficult for the character to wear anything other than modified padded armor.

Special Benefits

Each Freak has some physical deformity that gives the character specific advantages and disadvantages (the character also has a number of lesser deformities that have no effect in game terms). Deformities must be profound and grotesque: A bearded lady or a man with a cauliflower ear is not severe enough to qualify. Players and Dungeon Masters are encouraged to work together to create other, unique mutations for Freaks. Bonuses and penalties should rarely exceed +/- 2 points (or 10%). Mutations should be reflected in the character's ability scores, so the Dungeon Master should allow the player to rearrange ability scores after the mutation has been chosen to further reflect the mutation's effects. Each mutation benefit must also be offset with a corresponding penalty of roughly equal intensity.

The following are some sample mutations:

Claws for Hands

The character's hands resemble the claws of some animal, such as a lobster, lion, or other natural creature. The character can make two natural attacks per round for 1d3 points of damage each. All Dexterity checks that involve manual dexterity are made at a -3 penalty, and the character suffers a -15% penalty on Pick Pockets rolls.

Dwarfism

The character is halfling-sized (or pixie-sized if the character's race is normally Small-sized) and is able to easily enter and move about in small or confined spaces. The character gains a +10% bonus to Pick Pockets rolls, but suffers a -15% penalty on Climb Walls rolls. The character's base movement rate is 6.

Enlarged Limb

When using the enlarged limb, the Freak gains a +2 bonus on Strength checks, but suffers a -2 penalty on Dexterity checks.

Extreme Fat

Multiply weight by 1d3+1. The Freak takes half damage from bludgeoning weapons and unarmed combat. He or she suffers a +2 penalty to Armor Class (at worst AC 10) for presenting such a large target. In addition, the character will have great difficulty finding clothes or armor that fits, squeezing through small spaces, and riding normal horses.

Extreme Thinness

Divide weight by 1d3+1. The character suffers a -1 penalty on all Strength checks, but gains a bonus of -1 on Armor Class. The character can slip between portcullis bars and can easily escape normal-sized manacles.

Hairy Body

The Freak gains a +2 bonus on saves vs. cold-based attacks, but suffers a -2 penalty on saves vs. fire-based attacks.

Hunchback

The character gains a +2 bonus to rear Armor Class, but suffers a -1 penalty on all Dexterity checks.

Idiot Savant

One of the character's Intelligence- or Wisdom-based proficiencies is treated as if the character had a 19 in that ability score. For all other purposes, the character's Intelligence and Charisma scores are reduced to six or less (roll 1d4+2).

Scaly Skin

The character gains a -2 bonus to Armor Class, but must keep his or her skin moist at all times. If the Freak's skin dries out (an hour of direct sunlight will be sufficient to accomplish this), he or she suffers the itching effects of an *irritation* spell until the skin is moistened again.

Triple-Jointed

The character can escape from nearly any bonds and can fit into extremely small spaces. The character also suffers a -2 penalty on all Strength checks.

Common Benefits

All Freaks can use their performing talents to influence a crowd's reactions (as the standard bard ability). If the crowd makes the saving throw vs. paralyzation, however, then the Freak is booed offstage, possibly with a few rotten tomatoes thrown in to add injury to insult. If the save is made with a natural 20, then the crowd is so

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disgusted or frightened by the Freak's appearance that they attack him, possibly becoming a lynch mob unless they are stopped by the authorities or the other carnival workers, who will always try to protect their own.

Freaks find it very easy to relate to other people and intelligent creatures who are scorned for their ugliness, or who hate the way their bodies have been warped and changed against their will. Such beings include broken ones, mongrelmen, ermordenung, and of course other Freaks. When dealing with these beings in non-combat situations, the Freak's -4 reaction penalty becomes a +4 bonus.

Special Hindrances

Aside from the physical disadvantages caused by mutation, a Freak suffers an automatic -4 reaction penalty from any person he meets, and does not receive the normal Charisma bonus when dealing with a stranger. If the character has reaction penalties then these apply in addition to the -4 penalty noted above. These penalties only apply until the Freak has a chance to talk with that person and demonstrate his true nature, and only if the NPC is willing to look beyond appearances and accept the Freak (Dungeon Master's call).

Races

Most Freaks are human, though a few rare demihuman Freaks may appear in domains where those races are found. While some Freaks are born with their mutations, many are the victims of magical experiments by wizards such as Azalin, the late lich-lord of Darkon, or Hazlik of Hazlan.



WRETCHED CREATIONS

Flesh Golems as Player Characters

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“And do you dream?’ said the demon. ‘Do you think that I was then dead to agony and remorse? . . . A frightful selfishness hurried me on, while my heart was poisoned with remorse. Think you that the groans of Clerval were music to my ears? My heart was fashioned to be susceptible of love and sympathy, and when wrenched by misery to vice and hatred, it did not endure the violence of the change without torture such as you cannot even imagine.”

—Mary Shelley
Frankenstein

INTRODUCTION

In *Van Richten’s Guide to the Created*, RAVENLOFT Dungeon Masters were presented with the mechanics for transferring the mind of a player character into the body of a golem. In those rules, the golem’s physical form provides obvious benefits, but the subsequent mental and moral deterioration makes such transference an undesirable situation at best. Thus, the mechanic is presented as temporary technique of personal terror, and if the player wishes to retain his or her character, the hero is expected to be restored to his or her original body eventually.

However, not all golems have their animating life force stolen from living sentient beings. When a golem is created with no such mind transference, Van Richten

hypothesizes that the animating force is a kind of vague “evil spirit”. Such a spirit is drawn to the lifeless creation by the intense desires and unholy hubris of the creator. Furthermore, such a spirit is, in the words of the good doctor, “utterly devoid of morality, pity, and sheer humanity”.

But what if Van Richten was wrong in his assumption? What if the soul that inhabits a newly created golem is something more than a supremely malevolent entity, completely incapable of remorse? In the *Requiem* rules, the Kargat shattered the notion that the undead are uniformly and irredeemably evil, that they should forever be relegated to the role of villain rather than hero. True, the effects of the Negative Energy Plane corrupt the soul (such as it is) of the undead hero, eroding his or her will over time. Such heroes are supremely tragic figures, and highly appropriate to the gothic horror setting of Ravenloft.

Why, then, must the golem be incapable of nobility? True, the alien soul within a golem’s breast pines for carnage and suffering. But if the undead can for a time resist the dark energies within, why not a golem? Could not one of the Created also take up arms against the agents of darkness? Could he not bulwark himself against the rage, confusion, and self-loathing he feels, and refuse to make the mistakes of his creator?

In that spirit, presented here are rules for creating flesh golem heroes in the RAVENLOFT campaign setting. After a great deal of early development and debate, I decided that these rules should deal only with creations of flesh. Not only are flesh golems the most common variety of Created in the Lands of Mist, but golems from more unusual materials present their own complications that would necessitate another level of complexity to these rules. Furthermore, there is a sense of tragedy and—yes—humanity to a flesh golem that is not as easily captured by, say, a mechanical golem.

Credit Where Credit Is Due

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Obviously, the immediate inspiration for these rules is *Requiem: The Grim Harvest* and *Van Richten's Guide to the Created*. Much of the material presented below—including the alignment grid and some of the proficiency-based abilities—are taken directly from the *Requiem* rules. No less important are the excellent systems for lycanthrope (“Beasts at Heart”) and broken one (“The Making of Men”) heroes developed by John W. Mangrum for the *Book of Souls* netbook. Furthermore, thanks should go out to my long-suffering players for assistance in playtesting this system.

FLESH GOLEMS IN RAVENLOFT: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

The flesh golems of the RAVENLOFT setting are quite different from the lumbering automatons encountered in other AD&D worlds. Although *Van Richten's Guide to the Created* covers the golems of the Land of Mists in great detail, a quick summary of its main points is in order.

Creation

The Ravenloft flesh golem is not created through the rituals of a spellcaster, but through the mundane (yet unspeakable) pursuits of obsessive men and women. By cobbling together pieces of dead flesh, such individuals hope to create life, to construct a perfect being to their exact specifications. These body parts must come from no less than six individuals. At the minimum, each arm, each leg, the trunk plus head, and the brain must each be procured from a different individual. By utilizing multiple “donors”, the creator ensures that there is a sufficient *spark of life* to allow for animation, but not enough lingering essence from the previous personalities to prevent it. Furthermore, since the expectations of the creator often demand much from the creation, many more “donors” than six are frequently utilized, and some creators are even known to turn to nonhuman flesh.

The animating force that will be housed in such a monstrous form can come from one of three sources. The first source (and subject of this article) is an inhuman “*darkling spirit*”, drawn to the fleshy shell by the psychic energy of the creator’s obsession. The second is a *stolen life* force that has been taken from another intelligent being and transferred into the golem’s form. Finally, there is the possibility of *brain transplantation*, wherein the brain of a living being is actually used in the golem’s construction. The moment when body and spirit are fused

requires an intense jolt of energy, and although this energy is often physical—such as a bolt of lightning—animation can also be achieved through the sheer psychic power of the creator’s obsession.

Common Traits

Flesh golems exhibit incredible Strength, Dexterity and Constitution. Contrary to popular belief, their Intelligence is often that of a normal human. However, their Wisdom and Charisma are pitifully low. Golems are free from most biological concerns, including respiration, aging, and susceptibility to disease and poison. Though they must eat, their nutritional requirements are slight. They are immune to any magic that affects the mind, including telepathic powers. A golem does, however, have a constant telepathic bond with its creator, allowing the creature to sense its progenitor’s thoughts. Most golems are highly resistant to physical damage, even from magical weapons and damage-dealing spells. Because of their powerful Constitution, most regenerate to some degree. Furthermore, many of the Created have unique abilities relating to their creation. Most also possess a *zeitgeber*, a stimulus that produces a programmed response from the golem.

Psychological Development

Most flesh golems go through a well-defined psychological progression following their creation. At first the golem experiences utter *dependence* on its creator. It trusts its creator implicitly, and the creator helps the golem learn about its new form and the world around it. Eventually, this idyllic situation is replaced by *confusion* as the golem encounters other intelligent beings and begins to sense that it is somehow different. The creator’s perfect child is revealed to be less than ideal. This confusion escalates into *betrayal* as the golem learns that it is a powerful being, held in check and manipulated by the creator. As time wears on, the creator is viewed less and less favorably by the golem. Exposed to its creator’s every thought, the golem comes to regard the creator with *contempt*, and manipulates the madman to torment him. Inevitably, the golem descends into utter *hatred* for its creator. Such a situation usually ends with the brutal murder of the creator at the hands of his creation.

CHARACTER CREATION

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This system deals with the creation of starting flesh golem characters whose life essence come from a so-called “darkling spirits”. As noted earlier, mechanics for transferring existing heroes into golem bodies have been covered in *Van Richten’s Guide to the Created*. Since the rules presented below deal only with flesh golem heroes, “golem” will from hereon be synonymous with “flesh golem”. Furthermore, gender-specific (“he” and “she”) and neutral (“it”) pronouns will be used interchangeably, since a flesh golem’s gender is sometimes muddled or completely indistinct.

Ability Scores

One of the more remarkable traits of flesh golems is their above average—and often, super-human—physical prowess. Almost without exception, the Created exhibit astonishing might, agility and stamina. And while many inexperienced hunters might believe otherwise, flesh golems have as much capacity to reason and mental acuity as a normal human. However, they are cursed with childlike simplicity; they have poor judgment and are easily manipulated. Finally, their dark souls, unusual upbringing, and hideous appearance make them social misfits with little capacity to relate to others. To generate a golem hero’s ability scores, roll for each trait as shown below:

Ability	Roll
Strength	4d4+4
Dexterity	4d4+4
Constitution	4d4+4
Intelligence	3d6
Wisdom	1d4+2
Charisma	1d4+2

Character Race

Golem heroes have no race *per se*. If they can be said to be of any player character race, in the sense that race is a unified set of abilities and culture, golem heroes are of the golem race! Nonetheless, the body parts that compose a golem came from someone. Though the multitudinous origins of most golem parts are strictly human, occasionally a nonhuman piece finds its way into the mix, so to speak. More often than not, this is a deliberate act of the golem’s creator in an attempt to imbue his or her creation with a specific feature or ability he or she finds desirable. Golems with such nonhuman parts have abilities and traits that derive from the original owner.

In order to determine if a golem hero has any nonhuman parts, roll on the following tables. For simplicity’s sake, this system uses Van Richten’s six

primary divisions of (1) brain, (2) torso and head, (3-4) two arms, and (5-6) two legs. Typically, flesh golems are not so easily divisible, and the player is free to describe just how such traits were achieved in the golem hero’s construction. For instance, elven arms may not necessarily be entire limbs sewn on at the shoulder, but a delicate grafting of elven muscle tissue and tendons on bones taken from several different humans.

The traits listed in the following tables refer to the racial abilities described in Appendix Two of *Domains of Dread*, while the thieving skill adjustments are self-explanatory.

Roll	Race	Traits
01	Dwarf	-1 Cha, Magic Resistance, Mining Skill, Fearlessness, Magical Item Use, +10% Open Locks, +15% Find/Remove Traps, -5% Read Languages
02	Elf	Secret Doors, Iron Will, +5% Hide in Shadows
03-04	Gnome	+ Int, -1 Wis, Magic Resistance, Mining Skill, Magical Item Use, +5% Open Locks, +10% Find/Remove Traps, +5% Hide in Shadows
05	Half-Elf	Secret Doors, Iron Will, +10% Hide in Shadows, -5% Open Locks
06-07	Halfling	Magic Resistance, Determination, +5% Open Locks, +5% Find/Remove Traps, +15% Hide in Shadows, -5% Read Languages
08-09	Half-Vistani	+1 Wis, +1 Int, Nature Affinity, Fire Building, Tralaks, Moon Madness
10-100	Human	None

Roll	Race	Traits
01	Dwarf	+1 Con, Infravision, -10% Climb Walls
02	Elf	+1 Dex, -1 Con, Infravision
03-04	Gnome	Infravision, +10% Detect Noise, -15% Climb Walls
05	Half-Elf	Infravision, +5% Detect Noise
06-07	Halfling	+1 Dex, -1 Str, Infravision, +5% Detect Noise, -15% Climb Walls
08-100	Human	None

Roll	Race	Traits
01	Elf	Weapon Expertise, +10% Pick Pockets
02	Half-Elf	+5% Pick Pockets
03-04	Halfling	Combat Bonuses, +5% Pick Pockets

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05-100	Human	None
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Table 5: Legs (1d100)

Roll	Race	Traits
01	Elf	Surprise Bonus
02-03	Gnome	Gnome +5% Move Silently
04-05	Halfling	Halfling Surprise Bonus, +10% Move Silently
06	Half-Elf	Half-Elf +5% Move Silently
07-100	Human	None

In addition, there is always a chance that the golem's creator turned to more unusual material than human or demihuman flesh. **Every golem hero has a 1% chance of possessing one truly unusual body part.** If this is the case, roll on the following table to determine the nature of this part. The result below supersedes any previous results from the tables above.

Table 6: Unusual Parts (1d8)

Roll	Part	Traits
1	Annis Head and Torso	60' infravision; -2 bonus to AC
2	Doppelganger Brain	+1 Cha; Disguise proficiency for free
3	Ermordenung Arms	Victims of unarmed attack must save vs. poison or take an additional 1d6 points of damage
4	Goblin Head and Torso	90' infravision; fang attack (1d6 damage)
5	Mind Flayer Brain	+1 Int; mental contact with golem (ESP, psionics) causes victim to be stunned for 1d8 rounds
6	Paka Brain	Summon and control 2d6 domestic cats once per day
7	Reaver Arms	Sw 12
8	Vampyre Head and Torso	Fang attack (1d6 damage), victim must save vs. poison with +2 bonus or be charmed

Character Class

Golem heroes are primarily physical creatures; they are not well-suited to classes that involve intense contemplation or social interaction. Furthermore, though many golems are highly intelligent, the golem's body cannot channel wizardly magic. For these reasons, golem heroes may only be fighters, avengers, thieves or fighter/thieves.

Furthermore, the spiritual battle that golem heroes are constantly waging with themselves precludes the kind of intense focus necessary to quickly advance in a character class. Golem heroes of good alignment require 20% more experience points to advance in level, while neutral golem heroes need 10% more experience.

Alignment and Descent

Although they arrive in the world as innocent as babes, golems soon find that their dark souls drive them to acts of darkness. Though golem heroes may stave off this descent into personal damnation for a time, the decay is as inevitable as the tides. Eventually, the rage and hatred that lurk within will become the hero's master. It is simply a matter of time . . .

Golem heroes utilize the same "alignment grid" system introduced in *Requiem: The Grim Harvest* for undead heroes. Starting golem characters should roll one six-sided die and one ten-sided die, and consult the alignment grid below. The dice indicate the row and column of the box to be checked on the grid, respectively. For example, a roll of 3 and 5 would indicate row 3, column 5 (neutral good). Alternately, with the Dungeon Master's approval, the player may select his or her alignment, placing the check in the center square of the appropriate grid. Of course, no golem hero may begin the game with an evil alignment.

At the conclusion of every adventure, the golem hero's player must check for alignment "descent". He must roll 1d10 and compare the result to the number of the row that he currently has marked on his alignment grid. For the purposes of this roll, a "0" is considered a "10". If that number is equal to or lower than his current position, he adds one to his row number. With this done, he repeats it for his column number. As can be seen, the further the golem plunges into the depths of depravity, the faster the descent.

Alignment Grid

	Lawful			Neutral			Chaotic		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Good	1	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	2	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	3	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Neutral	4	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	5	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	6	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Evil	7	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	8	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	9	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

Golem heroes are also required to check for alignment descent whenever they are called upon to make a powers check. One final note: all golem heroes are

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assumed to have failed one power check at the time of character creation (i.e., they are considered “Unclean”).

Common Advantages

Although the existence of a flesh golem is indeed tortured, it also has its advantages. All golem heroes are utterly immune to life-affecting spells and effects, suffocation, disease, and poison. They are also immune to mind-affecting spells and effects, as well as telepathic psionic powers. Attempts to read a golem hero’s mind always fail. Note that golems are still subject to fear, horror, and madness checks resulting from mundane situations. In fact, because of their low Wisdom, golem heroes are unusually susceptible to such mental trauma. Finally, like the undead, golem heroes do not age, and suffer no ill effects due to the passage of time.

Though flesh golems require sustenance, it is very limited compared to normal living beings. Once per week, golem heroes must consume an amount of raw meat or carrion about equal to a suckling pig. If they are unable to do so, they lose one point of Constitution per week until the hero consumes enough to make up the cumulative food debt. Lost Constitution points are regained at a rate of one point per day.

Common Disadvantages

Despite their incredible physical prowess and immunities, most flesh golems would give it all up in a second to be free of their less desirable traits.

Perhaps the most obvious handicap possessed by flesh golems is their nightmarish appearance. No matter how pristine a golem hero’s appearance, the creature is almost always horrible to behold. Puckered scars crisscross the golem’s skin, stitched with thick black thread. As a being cobbled together from the bodies of others, a flesh golem will always be hounded by its terrifying appearance. A golem hero’s meager Charisma score is based entirely on his personal magnetism and social skills, which are themselves very slim. The first impression that many folk receive when encountering a golem for the first time is one of utter shock and horror.

NPCs who first gaze upon a golem’s visage must make a reaction roll with a +12 (!) penalty. For this reason, no NPC, no matter how receptive, will ever have a response better than “Cautious” to a golem hero. Furthermore, the Dungeon Master may even rule that a horror check is appropriate. Alternately, the Dungeon Master may decide how a given NPC reacts, keeping in mind that the response will never be positive or even neutral. Most NPCs will simply scream and run away as fast as they can. For this reason, most golem heroes always swath themselves in concealing clothing.

Keep in mind that this does not apply to NPCs who have had extended contact with the golem hero. If the player character can win the trust of an NPC before revealing his or her true nature, the reaction roll may be waived, although the NPC will always at least be shocked by the revelation. On the other hand, careful role-playing might even negate a particularly bad reaction roll after some time. For instance, an NPC who is initially hostile to the golem hero might eventually be convinced that the “monster” is both intelligent and peaceful. However, this process will probably take a great deal of time and cautious interaction.

Although a golem hero’s companions may find his appearance to be a hindrance, they will inevitably come to fear the creature’s uncontrollable rage even more. Certain stimuli can unleash a primal fury in the golem’s darkling spirit. To satiate this volcanic rage, a golem hero may even rip his own companions to pieces.

Every time a golem hero is exposed to violence (even if he is not participating), involved in any kind of hostile confrontation (even verbal), or is surprised, the player should roll a six-sided die and consult the following table:

Roll	Result
1-3	Hero remains in control.
4	Hero flees the scene for 1d4 rounds.
5	Hero attacks the nearest nonparty member; regains senses in 1d10 rounds.
6	Hero loses control and attacks anything in sight for 1d10 rounds.

Although the player must act out the required result, he does not relinquish control of his or her character to the Dungeon Master. The golem hero is still very much himself; he is simply overcome by the violent impulses of his own soul. For this reason, any evil acts committed as a result of the rage roll are still subject to powers checks.

While this rage might be an intrinsic quality of the golem’s soul, every golem hero also has a legacy from his creation and upbringing. This legacy is called a *zeitgeber* (TSIGHT-gay-ber). The player must select one stimulus (a sight, sound, odor, situation, etc.) that triggers a programmed response in the golem. This response varies from individual to individual, and should be related to the golem hero’s background. For instance, a golem whose creator took her out to pick wildflowers every day might giggle happily and grasp at invisible butterflies when exposed to the scent of daisies. Regardless, the *zeitgeber* is always something that removes the golem mentally from his current situation, rendering him unable to take any actions for 1d6 rounds. Most golem heroes are aware of their *zeitgeber*, and guard it like a vital secret. In the

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hands of an enemy, a zeitgeber can be a powerful thing indeed.

Proficiencies

The Created have the same capacity to use weapon and nonweapon proficiencies as normal heroes. However, there are two important distinctions to a golem hero's proficiencies. First of all, the golem's "donated" brain retains some lingering memories from its previous life. These manifest as random nonweapon proficiencies that the character automatically possesses at character creation. Secondly, in order to develop their unnatural powers, golem heroes must spend nonweapon proficiency slots.

When created, a golem hero must devote half of his or her starting nonweapon proficiency slots (rounded up, including bonus slots for high Intelligence) to randomly determined proficiencies. The type of proficiencies is partially dependent on the racial origins of the golem's brain. Roll on the following tables until half of the hero's proficiency slots are filled.

Table 8 (1d4)

Roll	Result
1-3	Common Group (Roll on Table 9)
4	Racial Group (Roll on Tables 13-19, Depending on Brain Origin)

Table 9 (1d6)

Roll	Result
1-2	Roll on Table 10
3-4	Roll on Table 11
5-6	Roll on Table 12

Table 10 (1d10)

Result	Proficiency	Slots
1	Agriculture	1
2	Animal Handling	1
3	Animal Training	1
4	Artistic Ability	1
5	Blacksmithing	1
6	Brewing	1
7	Carpentry	1
8	Cobbling	1
9	Cooking	1
10	Dancing	1

Table 11 (1d10)

Result	Proficiency	Slots
1	Direction Sense	1
2	Etiquette	1

3	Fire Building	1
4	Fishing	1
5	Heraldry	1
6	Languages, Modern	1
7	Leatherworking	1
8	Mining	2
9	Musical Instrument	1
10	Navigation	1

Table 12 (1d10)

Result	Proficiency	Slots
1	Pottery	1
2	Riding, Land-Based	1
3	Rope Use	1
4	Seamanship	1
5	Seamstress/Tailor	1
6	Singing	1
7	Stonemasonry	1
8	Swimming	1
9	Weather Sense	1
10	Weaving	1

Table 13: Dwarf Proficiencies (1d8)

Roll	Proficiency	Slots
1	Ancient History	1
2	Appraising	1
3	Armorer	2
4	Engineering	2
5	Gem Cutting	2
6	Languages, Ancient	1
7	Religion	1
8	Weaponsmithing	3

Table 14: Elf Proficiencies (1d8)

Roll	Proficiency	Slots
1	Ancient History	1
2	Animal Lore	1
3	Armorer	2
4	Astrology	2
5	Bowyer/Fletcher	1
6	Herbalism	2
7	Languages, Ancient	1
8	Religion	1

Table 15: Gnome Proficiencies (1d10)

Roll	Proficiency	Slots
1-2	Ancient History	1
3-4	Engineering	2

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5-6	Gem Cutting	2
7-8	Languages, Ancient	1
9-10	Religion	1

Table 16: Half-Elf Proficiencies (1d6)

Roll	Proficiency	Slots
1-2	Animal Lore	1
3-4	Local History	1
5-6	Religion	1

Table 17: Half-Vistani Proficiencies (1d4)

Roll	Proficiency	Slots
1	Ancient History	1
2	Animal Lore	1
3	Astrology	2
4	Gaming	1

Table 18: Halfling Proficiencies (1d10)

Roll	Proficiency	Slots
1-2	Animal Lore	1
3-4	Astrology	2
5-6	Gaming	1
7-8	Healing	2
9-10	Juggling	1

Table 19: Human Proficiencies (1d10)

Roll	Proficiency	Slots
1	Hunting	1
2	Local History	1
3	Religion	1
4	Tracking	2

Proficiencies that are specialized for specific locales should be linked to the domain where the golem hero was created. Furthermore, because of the natural erosion of mental information during death and decay, these predetermined proficiencies are never pristine in their functioning. All predetermined proficiencies have a -3 penalty applied to them. This penalty may be bought off at character creation (or later) by spending additional slots to re-purchase the proficiency. Since the re-purchased proficiency is built on a pre-existing mental foundation, it gains a permanent +1 bonus. By doing this, the golem essentially attempts to perfect skills he or she only vaguely remembers.

For example, a player rolls up swimming as a predetermined proficiency. After the golem hero has advanced few levels, the player decides that this is a useful enough skill, but not if he has to endure a -3 penalty. Accordingly, the player spends a nonweapon proficiency slot to repurchase the swimming proficiency.

His swimming proficiency no longer has the -3 penalty, and in fact now has a permanent +1 bonus.

After half of a starting golem hero's nonweapon proficiencies are predetermined, the player is free to devote the remaining slots however he or she wants. Starting golem heroes may purchase proficiencies from the Common group, the appropriate class group, and the racial group corresponding to the race of his or her creator at normal cost. After character creation, however, they may no longer purchase from any racial group without paying an extra slot. Furthermore, golem heroes may also utilize their nonweapon proficiency slots to purchase supernatural powers.

The available golem powers are summarized on Table 20, and descriptions of each ability follow.

Table 20: Golem Abilities

Ability	Slots
Animate Undead	4
Attack Resistance	3+
Cause Disease	Varies
Cause Despair	2
Climb Walls	2
Damage Immunity	2
Damage Resistance	1
Hideous Laugh	2
Hide in Shadows	2
Hyper-Regeneration	6
Move Silently	2
Resilient Flesh	2+
Stench of Decay	3
Weapon Resistance	2

Animate Undead

(4 slots): Once per week, the flesh golem may *animate dead* as the wizard spell of the same name. The golem may animate a number of undead equal to twice its Hit Dice, and the undead are always zombies. The golem is limited to generic empathic commands, such as feelings of rage, and is unable to direct such commands at specific individuals (the undead never attack the golem, however). As normal for RAVENLOFT, the use of this ability necessitates a powers check.

Attack Resistance

(3 slots/plus): This proficiency grants the golem complete resistance to normal physical attacks. For every three slots spent on this proficiency, weapons must have at least +1 enchantment to strike the golem. For instance, by spending six slots on Attack Resistance, the golem may only be struck by +2 weapons or better.

Cause Disease

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(Varies): Though flesh golems are incapable of being afflicted with disease, some have ability to inflict a plague through their touch. Whenever a golem with this ability makes a successful barehanded attack, there is a chance that the victim will be infected by a disease.

The severity of the disease is dictated by the number of slots allocated to this ability. For one slot, the golem acquires the ability to inflict a *debilitating* disease. This disease begins to take effect 1d6 turns after the character is infected. At that point, the victim loses 1 point of Strength per hour until he is reduced to a Strength of 2. Victims without Strength ratings lose 10% of their hit points per hour until reduced to 10% of their starting hit point total. At that point, the victim is assumed to be so weak that he is practically helpless.

For three slots, the golem's attacks inflict a *fatal* disease. A fatal disease takes effect immediately upon the failing of a saving throw. From that point on, the victim gains no benefit from any of the *cure wounds* spells (*cure disease* spells still work, though), the natural remedies of those with the healing proficiency, or any regenerative ability. Any wounds sustained by the infected character heal at 10% of their normal rate. With each day that passes, the character loses 1 point of Constitution until that score reaches 0. When that happens, the infection as run its course and the character dies. Creatures without Constitution ratings lose 10% of their maximum hit points per day until all of these are lost.

Cause Despair

(2 slots): Three times per day the golem may send out a wave of despair through some eerie action, such as ripping its own flesh or gibbering maniacally. This counts as the golem's action for that round. Anyone looking at the golem must successfully save vs. death magic or be overwhelmed with feelings of apathy and despair. Effected individuals can only defend themselves, and may not take any offensive actions or attempt to flee at a rate faster than a slow walk. This effect lasts as long as the golem remains in the victim's sight.

Climb Walls

(2 slots): This proficiency is identical to the thief skill of the same name, save that the character must make a proficiency check to determine success or failure. The adjustments to success presented in *Domains of Dread* (pg. 268-70) are applied to the check at a rate of +/-1 for every +/-5% adjustment. The racial modifiers from Tables 2-5 above also apply. This ability is only available to non-thief golems.

Damage Immunity

(2 slots): This ability is an enhanced version of Damage Resistance (see below) that make the hero utterly immune to one specific form of elemental attack. Examples of possible attack forms include fire, cold, electricity, or acid. Not only is the golem utterly unharmed by such attacks, but any saving throws mandated by the attack are automatically successful.

Damage Resistance

(1 slot): Players who select this advantage should select one specific form of elemental attack to which their character is less vulnerable than normal. Examples of possible attack forms include fire, cold, electricity, or acid. Whenever the character is hit by an attack to which he is resistant, he suffers only half damage. In addition, any saving throw that the character is called upon to attempt because of the attack is made with a +4 bonus.

Hideous Laugh

(2 slots): Some golems are capable of uttering a horrible laughter that terrifies every creature that hears it. Upon making a successful proficiency check, the golem character can cause all who hear its laugh to make a successful saving throw vs. death magic with a -2 penalty. Those who fail suffer the effects of a failed fear check (see *Domains of Dread*). This ability is usable three times per day, and counts as the golem's action that round.

Hide in Shadows

(2 slots): This proficiency is identical to the thief skill of the same name, save that the character must make a proficiency check to determine success or failure. The adjustments to success presented in *Domains of Dread* (pg. 268-69) are applied to the check at a rate of +/-1 for every +/-5% adjustment. The racial modifiers from Tables 2-5 above also apply. This ability is only available to non-thief golems.

Hyper-Regeneration

(6 slots): Although many golems are always slowly regenerating on account of high Constitution, this powerful ability allows the golem hero to quickly recover hit points once he has been struck down. When the character is reduced below 0 hit points, he immediately begins regenerating 10 hp per round, until he is fully healed. The hero may rise at any time during this process once his hit points are above 0. However, the golem *never* regenerates damage done by fire or acid. If a hero has taken more than its full hp completely from fire or acid damage, he is utterly destroyed.

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Move Silently

(2 slots): This proficiency is identical to the thief skill of the same name, save that the character must make a proficiency check to determine success or failure. The adjustments to success presented in *Domains of Dread* (pg. 268-69) are applied to the check at a rate of +/-1 for every +/-5% adjustment. The racial modifiers from Tables 2-5 above also apply. This ability is only available to non-thief golems.

Resilient Flesh

(2 slots/plus): Many golems seem to shrug off devastating magical attacks like so much water. Not only is their flesh particularly resistant to damage, but their very nature seems to blunt the effects of arcane energies. For every two slots a player devotes to this ability, the golem hero receives a +1 bonus to all saving throws against damage-dealing magic.

Stench of Decay

(3 slots): A golem with this ability carries the ripe stench of decay about its body. Anyone-including allies-within ten feet of the hero must make a successful saving throw vs. poison or become utterly overcome by the stench. Affected individuals are unable to take any actions other than retching for 1d4+1 rounds. This save must be made each time an individual comes within range, but once the saving throw is made, the individual may remain unaffected until he leaves the ability's range.

Weapon Resistance

(2 slots): Some golems are less susceptible to attack by specific types of weapons. A player who selects this special ability must specify one weapon type – bludgeoning, slashing or piercing – to which her character is partially immune. Whenever the character is attacked with such weapons, she suffers only half damage.

Vulnerabilities

As in the *Requiem* campaign, golem heroes may earn extra proficiency slots by selecting vulnerabilities. **At character creation, a player may select up to 1d4 vulnerabilities for his or her golem hero.** Each vulnerability earns the character one extra nonweapon proficiency slot to spend. Vulnerabilities may not be added after character creation, however.

Allergen

The golem finds a substance of the player's choice painful to touch. The allergen should be related to the hero's creation or past. For instance, if the golem's

creator wore a rose in his lapel, the golem might have roses as his or her allergen. The golem might be unable to touch roses, rose oil, and even rosewater. Essentially, the golem has an allergic reaction to the dangerous material. The golem finds the material uncomfortable to the touch, and takes 1 hp of damage per turn spent in direct physical contact with the substance.

Allergen Ward

The hero cannot even stomach the presence of an item of the player's choice. When the hero is presented with its allergen, it must make a successful Fear check to avoid fleeing the area. Even if the check is successful, the creature is unable to approach within 10' of the offensive substance.

In some cases, an allergen can be used to create a barrier which the golem cannot cross. In the above example, rose petals could be spread in an unbroken circle to keep out the golem.

Animal Repulsion

Whenever the hero comes within 100' of an animal, that animal will become nervous and skittish. If possible, the animal will flee from the hero as quickly as it can. If prevented from retreating, the animal will become increasingly more frantic until, when the hero comes within 25', the animal becomes panicked.

If the animal is prevented from fleeing, its behavior will depend on its nature. Hunters, like dogs, wolves, or great cats, will attack the hero. Less aggressive creatures like horses, cattle, or deer, may injure or even kill themselves in their wild drive to escape.

It is impossible for the hero to mask his true nature, even with the aid of magic. Spells may fool common folk, but the senses of animals are far keener.

Weapon Vulnerability

A weapon or tool selected by the player is capable of harming the golem hero when *blessed*. This is not a weapon material, but an actual weapon type, such as a sword, pitchfork, or mace. As with allergens, the specific type of weapon should ideally be related to the golem's history.

CHARACTER BACKGROUND

Perhaps more than the average RAVENLOFT hero, a golem hero should have a clearly defined background and history. The story of the hero's creation and trials is an integral part of her identity. It is the hero's decision, however, whether to embrace that identity or shun it in favor of forging a destiny of her own.

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It is not absolutely necessary to develop a background for a golem hero. There is great potential for an amnesiac golem, who knows nothing of where he comes from. An entire campaign can revolve around a hero's pursuit of his identity and origin. Imagine the emotional power inherent in a scene where the hero, after years of searching, finally throws open the door to a decaying laboratory, his eyes falling upon the stained and charred slab where he first entered the world. However, the Dungeon Master should be consulted if this is the track a player wishes to take, for although it means interesting story possibilities, it also means more work.

Who was your creator?

The story of the hero's creator is just as important as the story of the hero herself. The creator's life is a prelude to the golem's own, brief existence. The creator's background should include not only mundane details about his life (such as race, social class, profession, etc.), but also his personality. Not all creators are mad from their humble beginnings, but most are at least a little egocentric.

Why were you created?

In many ways, this question is to a golem what "Who am I?" is a normal person. What was the fundamental emotion that drove the creator to pursue such an unspeakable task as the creation of life? Pride? Hatred? Loneliness? Desire? Some incomprehensible delusion that demanded it? How did the creator commit such vile acts as grave robbing and desecration? Did he feel remorse for stealing from the dead, did he rationalize it to himself, or was he just an unfeeling monster? Were particular parts chosen for their beauty or abilities? Perhaps the creator wished to bring a loved one back to life, or to create a perfect, amalgam being. Maybe the creator intended to use the golem as an unstoppable weapon, or to raise it lovingly like the child he couldn't have.

What was your early existence like?

Most golem heroes will have been "living" for only a year or two. Their early existence with the creator is vital in shaping their perceptions of the world. As the golem learns to adjust to the world, its early memories are filled with a dizzying mixture of happiness and confusion. The world is full of things to explore and experience, yet there are nagging doubts and painful moments. Most creators are loving and attentive to their creations, but maybe your creator was abusive from the outset. Such a hero might

be severely scarred from his experiences with his creator, and find himself socially crippled in the extreme.

When did you first realize you were "different"?

Eventually, every golem's psyche is dealt an irrecoverable blow. There is a moment when the golem truly begins to realize that something is not "right" about its existence. Since the creature has no frame of reference other than its own initially, this usually comes when it first encounters a person other than its creator. Such encounters rarely end well for any of the parties involved. Sometimes, however, the golem figures out on its own that its heritage is not "normal". Regardless of how it occurred, how did such a pivotal moment come about for your character? How did he react emotionally to such psychological trauma? What were the long-term effects of this event?

What happened to your creator?

In most cases, since golem heroes do not possess a telepathic link to their creator, it is assumed that the madman is dead. Almost all golem heroes experienced the loss of their creator before they could enter the betrayal stage of psychological development. This is not ironclad, however. Perhaps the golem killed his creator in an unexpected fit of rage (hence the failed power check), but the hero came to regret such an unspeakable act. If the hero did not have a direct hand in the creator's death, how *did* he pass on? Perhaps he suddenly took ill or perished in an unexpected accident. Was he murdered by someone he wronged, perhaps a "donor's" loved one? Lynched by irate villagers? Caught and executed for his crimes? In these latter cases, how did the hero escape with his life?

Why did you become an adventurer?

A golem hero is an unusual individual, in more ways than one. In the aftermath of their creator's demise, most golems would either go on a furious rampage of grief, or simply withdraw from the face of the world. Golem heroes are different. Their approach is to make something of their tortured lives, to take up a sword and fight for something. What is it that motivates your hero's pursuit of adventure? Is it a sense of justice or duty, or perhaps the pursuit of penance for his or her misdeeds? Maybe the golem is more aimless and lost, and is simply looking for a way to fill its existence with something interesting and exciting. Or perhaps he or she is even motivated by greed or thirst for power . . .

How do you see yourself and others?

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Golems have a viewpoint unlike any other creatures in the Land of Mists. In a world of the Born, they are the Created, brought into the world by the whims of a madman. This understandably affects their world view and their dealings with others. How does your golem hero see his or herself? As a tortured beast seeking only relief from its agony (“We belong dead!”)? A monster trying to fit in? Or maybe something more than human? Furthermore, it is important to clarify how the hero views other intelligent beings. Just because the golem has managed to stave off its descent into evil doesn’t mean that it empathizes strongly with the Born. A golem is still an alien creature, who struggles daily to understand the thoughts and motivations of others. In the golem’s experience, there are three types of people: Itself, the Creator, and Others. The struggle to understand the last type is, in many ways, the most difficult for the hero. Are mortals to be revered, as an ideal to strive for? Pitied? Resented? Feared? Protected?

TIPS FOR THE DUNGEON MASTER

The Dungeon Master should not take the presence of a flesh golem hero in his or her campaign lightly. Although golems are powerful creatures, their many disadvantages should deter all but the most twinkie or sophisticated players. The former will min-max their character into a vampire-shredding juggernaut, brushing off the complaints of outraged companions who have been on the pulping end of the golem’s rages all too often. On the other hand, a mature yet enthusiastic player is the ideal candidate for a golem hero. The player should enjoy the emotional development of their character as much as the statistical development. On the other hand, he or she should be even-handed enough not to demand the constant attention of the story or the Dungeon Master. Conversely, Dungeon Masters shouldn’t give all the interesting plot twists and intense scenes to the golem player character. When there’s a golem in the party, there is a tendency to forget all about the plain old human hero!

No matter what your player’s attitude, it’s important to keep the unique aspects of the golem hero’s existence constantly on his or her mind. This doesn’t require any new rules or ingenious strategies; just some Dungeon Master savvy and measured application of existing mechanics. There are two simple guidelines:

Use Ability Checks

The easiest method for emphasizing a hero’s nature is to call for Wisdom and Charisma checks. Although these are only infrequently rolled outside of a proficiency check, for the golem hero they can become a constant source of irritation. Anytime a character attempts to manipulate the hero, a Wisdom check can be appropriate. Another good time to ask for a Wisdom roll is whenever the player asks you a direct question dealing with common sense (“Will I have enough money to . . .”, “How long will it be before . . .”, “Is this a good idea?”) Charisma rolls are trickier, but can be called for whenever the hero has to deal with another individual one-on-one, particularly when the interaction is critical to learning something or accomplishing a task. As a point of balance, the Dungeon Master can waive physical ability checks at certain times. Ask yourself, is there really a need for a Strength roll on the part of a city guard (Strength 14) arm wrestling the hero (Strength 20)?

Isolation, Isolation, Isolation

It’s a tad underhanded and might get exhausting after a while, but constantly remind the player throughout his or her hero’s life that she is hideous, outcast, different, etc. Never slip and allow an NPC to react with anything but suspicion to a golem hero (even if they conceal themselves under clothes and bandages-what would you think of a seven foot tall fellow who looked like a leper?) The painful reminders of the hero’s heritage can never be escaped. Period. Even the most optimistic player can be worn down after countless encounters ending with screams and hurled rocks.

The final caveat is, of course, that the player of a golem player character should never feel like he’s getting away with a good deal. **Playing a flesh golem is long on effort and short on benefits.** However, this doesn’t preclude that it be rewarding for the player, and fun for everyone in your group.



October 31st, 753.

VALLAKI.



The subterranean chamber was strangely ovoid in shape, its walls flowing smoothly into its ceiling, as befits a sub-cellar carved by the flow of infernal winds. The edges of the room were cluttered with ramshackle wooden tables and cabinets, all brimming with scattered notes, sharp metal instruments, and peculiar glassworks.

Four men were bent over a low central table, their hands weaving back and forth over the object of their attention. Ernst paced back and forth near the chamber door, watching the work with anxious eyes.

“Well?” he asked, impatiently.

Drawden’s head rose up from the bustling throng of workers, pulling a long, heavy thread taut with his mouth. He glanced askew at Ernst.

“Almost finished,” he mumbled through clenched teeth, his brow dripping with sweat.

Ernst frowned. “And the stitches *are* going to hold this time, correct?”

“They’ll hold,” Drawden snarled.

“I only ask because you said that the *last* two ti—”

“*They’ll hold!*” Drawden snapped, his jaw nearly losing its grip on the thread. Drawden nudged Holder, working beside him, and pointed at something on the table. “Put your finger here,” he ordered.

Holder complied, and Drawden tied off the thread into a tidy bow. Drawden nodded across the table to Mynilar and Jaerdaph, and the four men all stepped back to behold their handiwork.

The burgomeister’s patchwork corpse lay upon the table, crude—but abundant—stitchwork joining its limbs to its torso, the head firmly reattached to its perch. Its eyes were glassy; its skin was white as paper.

“Now what?” asked Jaerdaph.

“Now,” replied Drawden, “we extract his Essential Juices.”

“His *what?*” gaped Mynilar.

Drawden scowled. “His Essential Juices.” He paused in vain for a sign of comprehension. “His blood and cerebro-spinal fluid, you medical primitive.” Drawden stepped up to the corpse, gesturing to a large,

cylindrical device installed in the ceiling, surrounded by a knot of copper tubing. From the ends of this tubing dangled a pair of crude hypodermic needles nearly as large as Drawden’s forearms. Drawden took a needle in each hand and poised them over the corpse.

“I will extract his Essential Juices,” Drawden continued. “My device will then distill these juices into a solution containing the slain burgomeister’s memories. Then, once we have reanimated the corpse, I will use my device to re-inject said solution *back* into the burgomeister, thus restoring his identity.”

Ernst gazed suspiciously at the contraption on the ceiling. “And you’re sure this is going to work?”

“Yes, of course,” Drawden grumbled. “I’ve done it dozens of times, err . . . more or less.”

“Really?” Jaerdaph mused. “I never knew. I’ve been uzzing that contraption to brew our brandywine.”

Ernst and Holder went green. Mynilar grinned. “Suddenly I’m glad I don’t drink,” he gloated.

Drawden threw Jaerdaph an icy stare, then turned back to his work. Turning the corpse’s head to the side, he violently plunged one of the needles into the skull, just behind the ear. He twisted a valve on the side of the needle, then pulled out the long plunger. Cloudy gray fluid starting flowing up the tubes into the device on the ceiling. Drawden then raised the second needle over the corpse’s deadly-pale chest, but stopped short.

“Wait,” he grumbled. “That’s right, he bled out. Who has the corpse’s blood?”

“Here it is!” beamed Holder, producing a large jelly jar brimming with a thick crimson liquid. Drawden snatched it away, closely examining it in the light of a hanging lantern.

“This blood is impure,” Drawden growled. “There is . . . *detritus* floating within it.”

Holder shrugged. “Well, we *did* have to wring it out of the carpet.”

Drawden looked incredulously back and forth between Holder and the jar of blood for a minute, then shrugged. “It will have to do.” He placed the jar on the table and dipped the copper hypodermic into its contents.

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Pulling the plunger, the tube started nosily slurping up the blood.

“What’zz the next zstep?” asked Jaerdaph.

Drawden put a hand on his hip, scratching his head with the other. “Blast,” he said momentarily. “I’ve forgotten.” He pointed to a bookshelf behind Jaerdaph. “Hand me that Van Richten’s Guide, would you?”

Jaerdaph pulled a tome from the cluttered shelf, dubiously eyeing the title on its spine. “We’re going to turn him into a lich?”

“No, you idiot,” snarled Drawden. “The *other* Van Richten’s Guide.”

Jaerdaph grabbed the next book, smiling as he read the title. “Ah, I zzee. That makezz more zzenzze.”

Drawden impatiently snatched the book from Jaerdaph’s pale fingers and started flipping through its pages, mumbling to himself. “Introduction . . . to those who would use this knowledge to feed the flames of their own obsessions . . . cast this work into your hearth fires . . . blah blah blah . . . unnatural . . . horrid . . . lull the creator to his doom . . . ah-hah! Here we are! The Spark of Life!” Drawden read on, his lips silently forming words. Finally he snapped the book shut.

“All clear now.” Drawden snatched the hypodermic from the now-empty jelly jar and stabbed it into the corpse’s chest. “Holder, you stand over there and turn that crank until I tell you to stop.” Holder did so, and the Essential Juices started sloshing around inside the copper cylinder on the ceiling.

Drawden turned to Jaerdaph. “Now I need *you* to deliver an electrical shock to the corpse.”

Jaerdaph cocked his cowed head. “Are we talking a *lightning-bolt*-shock or a *shocking-grazzp*-shock?”

Drawden grimaced. “We’re trying to jolt the body back to life, not cook it for dinner, you dolt.”

Jaerdaph nodded. “*Shocking-grazzp*-shock then. Juzt give me zzome room.” He stepped up to the body.

Drawden turned to Ernst and Mynilar, who looked on expectantly. “You two go stand in the back and don’t *touch* anything.” The two men slumped and shuffled to the rear of the room.

Drawden stood across the table from Jaerdaph. After calibrating his devices one more time, he thrust a finger at Jaerdaph. “Now! Give our creation *Life!*”

Jaerdaph nodded. “Coming right up.” He rolled up the billowing sleeves of his black cloak, revealing pale, stringy arms. “Clear!” Speaking a word of power, Jaerdaph clamped his outstretched hands on the corpse’s clammy flesh. Sparks jumped; the corpse jerked; the stench of ozone filled the laboratory.

“*Again!*” shrieked Drawden.

“Clear!” Again Jaerdaph spoke a word of power, again streamers of electricity jolted the corpse. The corpse’s arms shot up from the table, the hands rigidly flexing. A low moan rose from the corpse’s lips.

Drawden thrust a hand at Holder. “Stop turning the crank! Pull the lever to your left *all* the way down!”

Holder complied at once, and a pale pink fluid started oozing back down the jangling tubes from the device in the ceiling. Drawden grabbed the hypodermic jutting from the corpse’s skull and pressed the plunger home, injecting the distilled Essential Juices back into the creature’s head. Jaerdaph followed his lead, doing the same with the hypodermic thrust into the corpse’s chest.

As the Essential Juices flowed into the reanimated creature’s veins, it shrieked monstrously, buckling in agonized spasms. Drawden and Jaerdaph threw themselves across the creature’s chest, trying to hold it still. Before the others could rush to their aid, the creature kicked the two men away, sending them sprawling into separate cabinets, scattering esoteric supplies across the floor. As the others cowered or crawled to safety, the creature sat up on the table, wailing semi-formed gibberish. With awkward, jerking movements, it yanked the needles out of its brain and heart, then rolled off the edge of the table, standing on bare, unsteady feet.

The others cowered in the shadows as the newly-created flesh golem glared at them with crazed, fearful eyes. Stiff limbs were crudely sutured to the flabby, pasty body of the former fifty-year old burgomeister.

“It’s a horror,” whispered Ernst.

“It’s an abomination,” gasped Holder.

Drawden rose to his feet, his eyes red with tears.

“It’s the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen.”

Drawden slowly approached the wobbling, moaning creature, tenderly placing a hand on its shoulder.

“Do you know who I am?” Drawden asked in childlike tones. The creature merely stared at him warily, wagging its tongue.

“I *created* you,” Drawden sobbed. “I gave you *Life!* I’m your new daddy! Yes! I gave you a little part of *me!* You and I, we’re linked! You *complete* m—”

Ernst stepped up to the creature, shoving Drawden out of the way. “Yes, that’s quite enough of that.” Drawden went sprawling into a rack of bottled organs. Ernst kept his eyes locked with the golem’s gaze. “You can play paddy-cakes later. We have less than an hour to get this slobbering thing out the door.”

Ernst scowled, looking deeper into the creature’s wavering eyes. “He still seems fairly befuddled if you ask me. And we lack the time to coax him back into a normal existence.” Ernst glanced back at the others. “I’m going to use *The Voice*. Holder, plug your ears; we don’t need you getting hypnotized again. You of course remember what happened the *last* time.”

Holder frowned. “No . . . *what* last time—”

“Potato soup,” spat Ernst.

“B’gawk!” clucked Holder, his head bobbing. “Oh, right. *That* last time.” He clapped his hands over his ears and started humming to himself.

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Ernst turned his attention back to the creature, taking its face in both hands to steady its gaze. “*YOU ARE THE BURGOMEISTER OF VALLAKI,*” Ernst intoned, speaking in The Voice. The glassware around the room rattled as The Voice unleashed the power and the madness of the Pandemoniac winds. The rest of the Kargatane clapped hands over their ears as well.

“*YOU ARE GOING TO GO HOME TO YOUR WIFE,*” Ernst continued. “*YOU VISITED OUR SHOP TODAY. WE SOLD YOU A LOVELY BOOK ABOUT . . . MMM . . . PETUNIAS. NOTHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY OCCURRED. YOU WERE NOT BUTCHERED BY A DEATH TRAP. YOU WERE NOT BROUGHT BACK FROM THE GRAVE. TODAY WAS A PERFECTLY NORMAL DAY.*”

Jaerdaph spoke up, shouting to be heard over Ernst’s wailing voice. “ZZay, I’ve thought of a problem. Izzn’t hizz wife going to notizze that he’zz been zzewn together?”

Ernst glanced back at the shadowy, cloaked figure. “Blast, you’re right. Grab some gauze to cover up these sutures. The rest of you start getting him dressed.”

Ernst turned back to the golem. “*YOU DO NOT WANT YOUR WIFE TO LOOK UNDER YOUR BANDAGES. YOU HAVE A RASH, AN ITCHY RASH. DO YOU UNDERSTAND? A VERY BAD RASH.*”

The slightest hint of awe floundered within the golem’s dull gaze. “Vah . . . bah . . . rah . . .” it drooled. Ernst scowled. “Good enough.”



The cellar door creaked open. Drawden and Holder stepped back out into the main room of the book shop, each leading the lumbering golem by the hand.

“Do you think,” pondered Holder, “that his wife will notice he’s wearing different clothes?”

“I’m not even going to bother thinking about that,” answered Ernst as he followed the first trio out into the aisles, flanked by Jaerdaph and Mynilar. The five men carefully led the golem to the front of the store, being careful to avoid Aisle Five. And Aisles Two and Four, for that matter. They stopped at the ends of the aisles, clustering around the golem.

“Where are you going?” asked Ernst.

“Hooooomme . . .” moaned the golem.

“And who’s waiting for you there?” asked Holder.

“Wiiiiiff . . .” groaned the golem.

“And what happened here today?” asked Jaerdaph, slipping a book into the golem’s hand.

“Puhtooonyas . . .” moaned the golem.

“Very good,” sobbed Drawden. “Very good indeed! Now go on home before I lose my nerve!”

“Or I lose my lunch,” murmured Mynilar.

Drawden gently pushed the burgomeister into the vestibule, and it started lumbering on its own towards the front door. Several of the men sighed with relief.

Ernst crossed his arms, glanced at the hanging clock, and smiled. “And still with half an hour till sunset. Gentleman, congratulations on a job well done.”

“Yes indeed,” sighed Holder, mopping his brow. “You know, for a little while there I was actually starting to fear that a life of sin might actually have consequences. That we wouldn’t have ever been in this mess if it weren’t for our own sinister deeds, you know? Cosmic justice, and all that rot.” He whistled. “But now I see that I was just panicking.”

Jaerdaph beamed. “Evil triumphzz onzze again,” he boasted. Everyone nodded in silent agreement.

The golem was almost to the front doors, passing between the front desk and the stuffed creature dubiously labeled a bear, when William’s gleeful voice echoed up from the vents.

“*Done!*” he cried. Everything after that was a blur.

The cadaverous podling burst up from the floor, holding the annual report over his head, using that heavy tome to push open the heavy metal grate.

“I’ve finished the annual report,” he shouted to his wide-eyed compatriots. “We’re in the clear for another—”

William had lifted the grate just an instant before the plodding burgomeister planted his foot where the grate had just been. The creature foundered off-balance for just a moment before toppling forward. William had just enough time to peer up quizzically at the wailing creature wobbling above him before it fell.

The weight of the golem came down on the grate.

The weight of the grate came down on the tome.

The weight of the tome came down on the podling’s head. The podling’s head burst almost exactly like a crushed pumpkin. The podling dropped back into the crawlspace like a puppet with cut strings. The grate clattered back into place. The golem fell to the floor, rolling off to one side of the grate. It lay there, dazed.

Several of the Kargatane gasped, but none of them dared move. For a moment, all was still. Then came a sound from the crawlspace: a moaning, whistling noise, a wailing sound no natural creature could ever make.

Then an arm shot out from under the grate, lifting it just a few inches. It was a wasted arm, the skin taut against the bones. It blindly clutched at the floorboards once, twice. On the third try it touched the fallen burgomeister’s leg and reflexively clamped on tight.

A second arm shot out from under the grate. Its hand wore a black ring and clutched a black dagger, both covered in runes.

Several of the Kargatane choked out words. “No!” “Wait!” “Don’t!”

The dagger lashed out, biting deeply into the burgomeister’s calf. The golem’s eyes widened, and it wailed in protest. As the dagger struck, the runes on the

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hilt and ring glowed crimson, and the spidery arms *expanded*, filling out the withered skin just a touch.

“No, stop!” shrieked Drawden. All the Kargatane rushed forward, a mad dash for the grate.

The dagger lashed out again and again, one slash after another in rapid succession, while the other arm dragged the wailing creature under the grate, down into the crawlspace. The golem wailed all the way down.

“Bah Rah! Vah Bah Rah!”

Drawden was the first to the grate, making a grab for the golem’s outstretched hands just before they were pulled out of sight. Ernst tackled Drawden to the floor before he could follow the golem into the black depths beneath the floorboards.

“Trust me, Drawden,” Ernst advised his wailing comrade. “You do *not* want to stick your hands in there.” The two men sat up on the floor, looking down through the grate. Mynilar and Jaerdaph joined them, sitting on the floor. Holder opted to sit on the base of the stairs to the balcony. They all sat quietly on the floor for several minutes, listening to the wet, monotonous noises from the crawlspace while they watched the clock on the wall. Drawden sobbed.

“Well,” mused Jaerdaph, “It wazz a not-entirely-awful plan while it lazzted.”

After a few minutes the hacking sounds petered out. Ernst leaned close to the grate. “William, are you done? Would you come up here please? We’d like to have a little chat with you before Strahd pops by to butcher us.” The shadows of the crawlspace kept mum. “William, if you don’t come up here now I’ll get the hook. Do you *want* me to get the hook?”

Something rustled below, and a moment later William pushed the grate open. He was splattered with watery blood. He was also plump and smiling like a happy baby, his flesh filled out to fill his frame.

“How are you doing, William?” Ernst asked.

William started to nonchalantly wipe his dagger clean. “I’m feeling much better now, thank you.”

Ernst steepled his fingers. “And the golem? Any chance that it might be salvageable?”

William peered down at something near his feet, frowning. “I shouldn’t think so, no.”

Ernst nodded. “Mmm, yes, yes. You *do* realize that you’ve just *killed* us, right?”

William shrugged. “I’m not going to say I’m sorry.” He glared at his seething compatriots. “You know, when one’s *head* has been reduced to *mulch*, one does not have a great deal of time to conceive of remedial actions. I did what I needed to do.”

Holder stood up, brushing the dust off his trousers. “Well, this has been fun,” he sighed. “I think I’m going to go up to my room and sacrifice myself to the Eldritch Things From Beyond now. It’s certainly a less awful fate than what we’re in for tomorrow morning.”

“Wait!” Ernst shouted, springing to his feet. “We aren’t doomed yet. We still have twenty minutes to find a solution.”

“Are you daft?” barked Mynilar. “We couldn’t be more doomed if our juicy brains were on sale in a Juicy Brain Shop in Bluetspur.” The others eyed him strangely. He shrugged. “Well, we wouldn’t.”

Ernst smoothed back his hair, taking a deep breath. “What I’m saying is that we have not yet utilized *all* of our available resources. I admit it: I have no bloody idea what to do. But fortunately for us, *I* am not the greatest evil genius currently under this roof.”

Holder’s eyes brightened. “You mean . . .?”

Drawden stopped sniffing. “You mean . . .?”

Mynilar’s jaw dropped. “You *don’t* mean . . .”

Ernst thrust out an upraised finger. “Yes! Why have we been such fools? We haven’t even *asked* Ryven what we should do!”

“But wait,” warned Jaerdaph. “It’zz almozzt zzix o’clock. Ryven’zz napping now. And you know how much he *hatezz* when we dizzturb his napzz!”

“He’ll understand,” exclaimed Holder. “He’ll have to!” The others all shot to their feet. “To the attic!”

Holder bolted up the stairs, Ernst, Drawden, and Jaerdaph hot on his heels. William scrambled up out of the crawlspace, chasing after the others.

Mynilar was left alone in the room. “This isn’t funny anymore!” he shrieked. “We need to run away! Right now! We can go live with the goblins in Forlorn! Or toss ourselves into the Shadow Rift! *Any* plan would be better than talking to Ryven!” The only reply was the sound of rapidly receding footsteps. Shaking his fists, Mynilar started to scream in frenzied panic as he raced up the stairs.



Ernst grimaced at the others, clustered tightly around him at the door to Ryven’s attic bedchamber. “Shh,” he hissed in irritation. “Everyone settle down. It’s bad enough we’re disturbing his nap; we don’t need to give him any extra reasons to be annoyed with us.”

The others fell silent instantly. Holder clapped a hand over his mouth. Ernst took a deep breath, tugged the wrinkles out of his waistcoat, and lightly rapped on Ryven’s door.

“Ryven? Can we come in? I know we’re intruding, but we have a bit of an emergency and we need your advice.”

There was no reply.

“Blazzt,” Jaerdaph whispered. “I bet thizz izz my fault. I probably didn’t duzzt hizz room well enough. You know what a zztickler he izz . . .”

BOOK OF SECRETS: INTERLUDE

Jaerdaph's whispering was drowned out as Mynilar came shrieking up the winding, narrow stairs. The others stepped out of the barreling madman's way, pressing against the walls. Mynilar's charge carried him right into Ryven's door; the door burst open, and Mynilar went tumbling into the room.

The others timidly filed into the room, clustering near the doorway. The only light in the room spilled in through the open door and a tiny round window in the far wall that admitted the last, dying beams of daylight, but the chamber was spotless. Not a mote of dust lay upon the crates of knickknacks and supplies piled around the room. Not a cobweb was to be seen on the steeply sloping ceiling, or from the razor-edged farm implements hanging from the rafters.

Not a single dead rodent marred the ring of rat traps lying on the floor around Ryven. The Kargatane cowed before their exalted leader. Ryven sat upon a comfortable divan, the upholstery wearing thin in only a few places. Finely tailored clothes adorned his near-skeletal body. Ryven appeared to be pleased to see his underlings, or perhaps he merely delighted in their groveling. Regardless, a rictal grin brightened his withered, leathery, sunken face. His head hung slightly tilted to one side, a silent demonstration that he was both listening and sympathetic to the plight that faced his minions.

Mynilar clambered back to his feet. His face was white with fear.

"You idiots! You're wasting time! We need to shut this place down and lose ourselves forever before dawn, and Ryven is *not* going to help us!"

The others scowled. "Mind your tongue, Mynilar," warned Ernst. "Ryven may be enough of a gentleman to ignore your insults, but some of the rest of us are finding our patience wearing a bit thin."

"Oh, I'm sorry," Mynilar cried, waving his hands in the air. He walked around behind Ryven's divan, leaning down to talk into Ryven's ear. "Have I insulted you," he purred. "No?" Mynilar feigned surprise. "But why is that, Ryven? Is it because *you've been dead for two years?*"

Mynilar stood upright again, now screaming at the group clustered around the door. "Ryven's Dead! He is Decimated, Desiccated, Decomposed, Decayed, and Defunct!" Mynilar's shrieking was met only by the others' silent glowering. "Ryven Trylbare is a *Deceased Kargatane!*" His rant still earned only hostile stares.

"Here, allow me to demonstrate." Mynilar clamped a hand on Ryven's mummified neck and wrenched the head loose with the sound of a snapping branch. Grisly trophy in hand, he sauntered over to his silent companions, offering the head to each of them in turn.

"Notice the fine latticework of cracks," Mynilar demonstrated, tracing the fractures with his finger, "where Ryven's skull became *intimate* with the rock." Mynilar

huffed back to the headless, mummified corpse on the divan. "Ryven fell off a horse two years ago and died a deadly death." He flipped Ryven's leathery skull into his bony lap. "Now deal with it!"

Mynilar slumped in a corner, exhausted. The others stared at him in shocked silence, then hesitantly shuffled closer to the divan, clustering around the ruined corpse. Ernst bent down, tenderly plucking the skull from Ryven's lap. With equal care, he nestled the grinning skull back onto Ryven's bony shoulders, using the luxurious collar to keep it in place. Ernst examined his handiwork with sad eyes as the others looked on in reverent silence. After a moment, Ernst crouched down to come eye-to-eye with the corpse.

"Ryven, we *really* need your help," said Ernst.

"Yezz, Ryven," added Jaerdaph. "Ignore Mynilar. He'zz mad with fear. He doezzn't know what he'zz zazing." The others murmured their agreement.

Mynilar ran screeching from the room. At the bottom of the attic steps, he recovered his senses. Defeated, he turned around and trudged back up the stairs. Mynilar slogged back into Ryven's room just in time to see Ernst holding his ear next to Ryven's face.

An instant later, Ernst's head shot up. "That's *brilliant!* That's absolutely *stellar!*"

Mynilar groaned. The others pressed in close.

"What's his plan?" inquired Drawden.

Ernst turned to face the group. "It's desperate, but it'll work. We'll need two things."

"What, what?"

"First, we'll need a scroll from the magical hoard Jaerdaph thinks we don't know about."

"What!" yelled Jaerdaph.

"Which hoard," asked Holder. "The one under his bed or the one in his closet?"

"We'll need the spell in the blue scroll tube from under his bed," Ernst confirmed.

"Oh, that one," Holder nodded. "I'll fetch it at once." He turned to run downstairs, but stopped mid-stride. "Wait a moment. The *blue* scroll tube? But that means . . ."

"Yes," Ernst confirmed solemnly. "The second thing we'll need is a volunteer. One of *us* must undergo the magic."

Mynilar shook his head in disbelief, stabbing his finger at Ryven. "You don't honestly expect me to believe that would-be scarecrow actually told you a useful plan!?"

Ernst nodded. "Mmm, yes, yes. It's the only way. He's also decided which of us will be sacrificed to the plan." Ernst looked down at the corpse. "Ryven says *I* don't have to be the sacrifice because *I* am his second-in-command."

BOOK OF SECRETS: INTERLUDE

Jaerdaph jumped in. “And Ryven *zzayzz I don’t have to be the zzacrifizze becauzze I’m already zzurrendering the zzcroll!*”

William raised an eyebrow. “Ryven says *I don’t have to be the sacrifice because I do all the cooking.*”

Holder threw out his hand. “Ryven says *I don’t have to be sacrificed because I haven’t finished filing away those maps from Mordent yet!*”

“Ryven says *I don’t have to be sacrificed,*” grinned Drawden, “just because he likes me.”

Five sets of suspicious eyes fell on Mynilar.

Mynilar’s jaw dropped. He jutted a pointing finger at one man, then another, unsuccessfully trying to choke out a response. Finally his eyes fell on the grinning corpse. His face twisted into a scowl as he bent down to address Ryven’s mummified remains.

“Someday, Ryven,” he spat, slowly shaking his fist, “I’m going to *get* you for this.”



The grandfather clock in the dining room of the burgomeister’s manor chimed six, then continued with its sedate ticking. The sun had been down for nearly thirty minutes. The aroma of well-cooked steak wafted up from the meal laid out on the linen tablecloth.

“You know,” said the burgomeister’s wife as she patted her lips with her napkin, “you gave me quite a fright today. I was starting to think I’d never see you again! You know, if you’d come home five minutes later I wouldn’t have let you in! You can be quite a beast sometimes, you know, making me fret like that.”

At the far end of the table, the burgomeister sat hunched over his plate. His eyes were cowed. One hand numbly held a fork to his mouth. As his wife paused to take a sip of wine, he remembered about the fork and gobbled down the bite of steak skewered upon it.

“Well?” began his wife again. “What do have to say for yourself?”

The burgomeister’s eyes flinched. “Err . . . um . . . Sorry, pumpkin?”

“Well, you should be. And—oh, dear me, wait. I forgot about the potatoes. Bring the potatoes out from the kitchen, dear.”

Her husband glanced around the room helplessly.

She gave him an icy stare, pointing at the kitchen door with her fork. “You know, the kitchen?” Her husband leapt towards the door. “You’re such a child.”

“Um,” mumbled the burgomeister as he disappeared through the door, “sorry, pumpkin.”

“Well, you should be.” Her nose crinkled. “Pumpkin?” she murmured to herself, quizzically.

The burgomeister wandered aimlessly around the manor’s kitchen. “If I were a potato, where would I—”

Without warning, a hand thrust itself out of a nearby cabinet to point at a bowl full of boiled potatoes.

“Ah!” yelped the burgomaster.

“Sh!” hissed a voice from the cabinet.

The burgomaster cautiously opened the cabinet door a few more inches to reveal a man scrunched inside.

“William? What are you doing in the cabinet?”

“Calm down, Mynilar. It’s a secret passage.”

“We have a secret passage into the burgomeister’s kitchen cabinet?”

“It’s not what we were aiming for, no, but it does the trick.”

Mynilar leaned in close. “Look, how long is this blasted polymorph magic supposed to last?”

“In this case, until dispelled, unless I’m mistaken.”

Mynilar groaned. “So what’s the plan?”

“The others are going to forge a letter from Strahd ordering the burgomeister to visit him at his castle. You leave Vallaki, you never arrive there, the rest of the story writes itself.”

Mynilar scowled. “So how long is it going to take them to forge this accursed letter? I don’t know how long I can take this place. It’s so . . . *mundane.*”

“The letter is probably already done. But they’ll wait a week before delivering it to make sure no one links the man’s death with his visit to our shop. They might draw it out just to needle you, too.”

Mynilar sighed. “So what are *you* doing here?”

William shrugged. “On one hand, I suspect I’m being punished for reducing Drawden’s golem to a puddle. On the other hand, I’m your dialogue coach.”

Mynilar scowled. “Come again?”

“Well, for one thing, don’t call her ‘pumpkin’. The real burgomeister called her ‘Dearest,’ or ‘Twiddlekins,’ depending on the scenario in question.”

The burgomeister’s wife called in from the dining room. “Haven’t you found those potatoes yet, dear?”

Mynilar groaned. “Right here, pum—uh, Dearest!”

“It’s about time. And don’t forget that after dinner you promised to rub my feet!”

Mynilar turned back to William, who was smirking. “Why does she want me to rub her feet?”

“I haven’t the faintest idea,” admitted the podling.

Mynilar picked up the bowl of potatoes, closing the cabinet door. “Just tell the others to hurry up with that damned letter.” He slammed the door a bit harder than he needed to.



OCTOBER 31ST, 1926.

DETROIT.



Eater of Sinners.

Eater of Souls.

Eater of Eternity.

Close the eyes of ignorant men.

Hardeen shut the window, spending a moment to watch the chill autumn winds blow dead, dry leaves across the front facade of Mercy Hospital. A black sedan sat idling outside the entrance; Hardeen couldn't make out the driver.

"Much better without that draft, eh?" he said, turning back to his brother. He threw a thumb towards the window. "The wind's picking up. It looks like we've got quite a storm blowing in." The antiseptic hospital room held two beds, but only one was occupied. Colorful bouquets filled every other flat surface.

Hardeen's brother was the elder by two years, but even in their prime Hardeen had always been the larger of the two. Now his brother seemed even smaller, swallowed by the hospital bed, his face sallow and drawn.

Hardeen's elder brother, Harry Houdini, lay near death. Nine days earlier, while chatting with university students in his dressing room in Montreal, Harry had allowed a young man to punch him in the stomach, to demonstrate that he could resist blows to his abdomen. As Hardeen had heard the account, the student had proceeded to hammer away at Harry's gut most unmercifully. On the train from Montreal to Detroit, Harry had started experiencing such severe stomach pains that he was admitted to the hospital in the middle of the night. Now, two operations later, Harry's surgeon Dr. Kennedy believed the assault had ruptured Harry's appendix, spreading a lethal infection.

Although they had lowered Harry's fever with an experimental serum, none of the doctors held any hope that Harry Houdini would ever leave the hospital alive.

Hardeen sat down again in a chair between the two beds. Harry regarded him with dark, tired eyes.

"How is Bess doing?" he asked, his face very still.

Hardeen kept up his grin for Harry's sake. "She's doing well. She'll be fine." Harry's wife lay in her own bed in another wing, recovering from food poisoning. This tour had suffered one setback after another. Hardeen glanced down at Harry's feet; Harry had broken his ankle in Albany. It seemed as if Fate itself had been conspiring against his brother.

Harry read his brother's expression and smiled wanly. "I expect that when I am gone, the Spiritualists will declare a national holiday."

Hardeen shrugged, smirking. "Yes, I suppose they will. Until next week, when you become the star of every rigged seance from here to Berlin, that is."

Houdini's face grew grim. "Keep your eye on Bess. Make sure she remembers our codes. She needs to be prepared, in case . . ."

Hardeen lay his hand on Harry's arm. "Your secret codes are safe, Harry. No phony medium will ever be able to claim they have Harry Houdini on their leash."

Harry nodded, his weary face more sedate.

Hardeen winced. "Sorry, old man. I didn't mean to upset you with all that bother." His face brightened, and he pulled several slips of paper from his coat. "We've gotten more letters and telegrams. Thousands of them! From all over the country! A brought a few to read to you . . ."

Harry nodded his assent, briefly closing his eyes. Hardeen picked out a telegram and read its contents.

"The magical fraternity is with you in your fight for health. You are the greatest of them all."

Harry's head sagged, his gaze wandering to the open doorway. "Pardon me?" he asked.

Hardeen missed the hint of annoyance in Harry's voice. "Sorry . . . 'the greatest,' it reads. Here's another: 'If you can squeeze out of boxes and other contrivances, you can certainly squeeze out of this job.'"

Houdini's gaze slowly slid across the room, until he was again staring directly ahead.

"I don't have to listen to this," he snorted, his irritation now apparent. Harry turned his head to look directly at his brother. "Hardeen, summon an orderly."

Hardeen was startled. "What's wrong? Why do you need an orderly?"

BOOK OF SECRETS: INTERLUDE

Harry looked away from his brother's gaze as he gave his reply. "To escort *you* out, sir."

"What?" Hardeen stammered. "Why would you say such a thing?"

Harry glanced back at him. He seemed as distracted as he was annoyed. "What? Don't be difficult. Go get an orderly."

Hardeen rose from his chair, looking miserable. "I don't know what I did to offend you, but I'm sorry. I'll go. Do you want me to send in anyone?" Harry wasn't listening. Hardeen slumped and turned to leave.

"Wait a moment . . ." mumbled Houdini. Hardeen stopped at the door, returning to his brother's side. His brother was still staring out into space, giving Hardeen's approach a mere glance. "Yes," Harry continued. "I *have* seen you before, haven't I? Was it in Montreal?"

Hardeen was confused. "What? No, Harry, I wasn't with you in Montreal. How are you feeling?" Hardeen lay his hand across Harry's brow, then tore it away.

"Good lord, Harry, your fever is raging!"

"So who are you then?" Harry seemed to be drifting off into his own world. "Some offended fakir, come to set the record straight? I've seen your kind in Port Said. You lot perform as if you all learned at one school." Harry's gaze shifted to his brother. "Blast it, Hardeen, go fetch the orderly!"

The truth slowly dawned on Hardeen. Harry was hallucinating. "Harry, who are you talking to?"

Harry snapped his head to fully face his brother. One of his hands ever rose from the covers, weakly gesturing to the end of his bed. "Are you blind? I'm being berated by this damned Turk!"

Hardeen stared at the air in horror. "Harry . . ."

Houdini cut him off, still staring into thin air. "*Real* magic? Hah! I've sought your 'real magic' all over the world," he growled. "I've hunted fairies in Cottingley. I've challenged a man who could see through steel. I've met women who could manifest ectoplasmic spirits from their ears. And do you know what I found every time?"

Hardeen grabbed his brother's shoulder. "Harry!"

"Nothing! Mere frauds and flim-flam! Cheesecloth ghosts, double exposures, and parlor tricks! That's your 'real magic'."

Hardeen shook his brother's shoulder as roughly as he dared. "Harry, listen. There's no one else here!"

Harry turned his head to his brother, but it was obvious he was having difficulty prying his eyes from that ominously empty space. Harry grimaced.

"What are you saying?"

"It's just you and me here, Harry." Hardeen stepped towards the foot of the bed. "We're the only people in the room—"

As Hardeen said this, he had thrown out his arms to demonstrate the empty air. But as his left hand passed over Harry's feet, it *struck* something. Something that

felt like cloth and wire. Something *unseen*. Hardeen froze in shock for a moment, then hesitantly extended his hand again, feeling the empty space. Nothing. He gently patted the blanket lying over Harry's feet. Nothing lay there. He started to doubt his own sanity.

Suddenly Hardeen realized what he needed to do. "Just hold on, Harry. I'm going to fetch Dr. Kennedy."

"Yes," whispered Harry, his face ashen, his eyes staring at the air. "Yes, get the doctor."

Hardeen ran out into the sun-dappled hallway. It took him several minutes to reach Dr. Kennedy's office, but the doctor replied to his knock.

"It's my brother," Hardeen panted. "He's half-mad with fever! You need to come quickly."

Dr. Kennedy rose from his desk, looking grim. "I'll prepare another dose of the serum. Go back to your brother. We'll send a nurse to notify Mrs. Houdini."

Hardeen nodded and ran back out. Stopping at a nurses' station, he asked to use the telephone. Dialing the number of his hotel, he left a message with the front desk, telling the rest of his family to hurry over to the hospital; time may be short.

Finally, Hardeen returned to Harry's room, just behind Dr. Kennedy and a pair of assistants. Hardeen could hear his brother rambling as he approached.

". . . Death? Or a servant?" Harry asked the air. He fell silent as the group entered. His face grew even more tired. "I see." Harry turned to face his brother, weakly holding out his hand. "Theodore . . ."

Hardeen was taken aback. When was the last time Harry had spoken his real name? Or used his own. Hardeen clasped his brother's hand at once.

"Harry? . . . Ehrich? I'm here."

A final peace settled over Harry's features as the doctors scurried around him. "I am tired of fighting," he sighed. "I guess this thing is going to get me."

A moment later, Houdini's face was still. His hand went limp in Hardeen's grasp.

Dr. Kennedy pulled Hardeen away, stepping in to examine his patient. Hardeen drifted off to the corner of the room. He stared blankly out the window as the storm clouds blew in.

He heard a doctor declare the time of death to be 1:26 PM, but he wasn't listening. His mind was drifting back through the years. Before Harry's campaign against the Spiritualists, before the great escapes, before the fame. He thought back to the years before the turn of the century, when he and Harry had briefly performed together as the little-known Brothers Houdini.

"Well, Harry," he whispered to himself. "Now you really are a magician among the spirits . . ." ☠

BOOK OF SECRETS: RUNNING THE GOTHIC EARTH

THE HAUNTED CAIRN

A Complete Adventure for Gothic England

by Bil Boozer

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BIOGRAPHY

An ancient spirit walks the English countryside looking for mortals to aid her, looking for release from the bonds that tie her to Gothic Earth, looking for the peaceful restfulness of home.

APPEARANCE

Kwerdhyl appears as a haggard-looking, dark-haired woman wearing a tattered bearskin cloak. Just over 6' tall and broadly built, she generally appears only to lone travelers or small groups. Anyone looking into Kwerdhyl's blue eyes can easily sense her overwhelming sadness, even when she's angry.

KWERDHYL ("KUH-uh-r-thil")

Dhoat, Chaotic Evil

Armor Class	3	Str	N/A
Movement	12	Dex	10
Level/Hit Dice	4+3	Con	N/A
Hit Points	22	Int	12
THACO	17	Wis	8
Morale	12	Cha	8
No. of Attacks	1	XP	650
Damage/Attack	See below		
Special Attacks	Illusions		
Special Defenses	Incorporeal, invisibility		
Magic Resistance	See below		

Note: A dhoat is a specialized type of ghost described in *DARK SUN MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix II: Terrors Beyond Tyr*, but that sourcebook is not needed to use this character or the adventure that follows.

BACKGROUND

Centuries ago, Kwerdhyl was the robust daughter of a leader of the Celtic tribe called Cornovii. Though she deeply loved one of her cousins, Caradawg, she agreed to

an arranged betrothal with the son of a leader from the neighboring tribe of Deceangli. She left her family and her heart-broken lover to live with her new husband, Eurneadh.

Kwerdhyl did not fit in well with the Deceangli, and she came quickly to despise her husband, whom she regarded as weak and unambitious. In front of him and his family, she made no secret of her desire to return to Cornovii, although she did not tell them of Caradawg.

In Kwerdhyl's absence, her former lover's sadness grew into anger. Through chicanery and treachery, Caradawg rose in the ranks of the tribe so that he was able to take over the mantle of leadership following the accidental death of Kwerdhyl's father.

Having made no friends among the Deceangli, Kwerdhyl heard nothing of what had happened with her own tribe. After two years of marriage, she decided to leave her husband and return to her lover, Caradawg. She stole out during the night and traveled alone to Buxton, where she met up with others of her tribe who agreed to escort her to her home. She learned from them that Caradawg had become leader of their clan, but she was saddened to hear of the death of her father.

Caradawg had moved into Kwerdhyl's father's home, and he received her there. The reception was icy. He informed her that she was not welcome there and that she was banished from the tribe. When she reached supplicantly for him, he backed quickly away. She could see that there was only anger in him, so she turned and left, returning to Buxton. There, as she prayed to the gods for salvation from her misery, Eurneadh thrust a short sword through her back.

An amateur assassin, Eurneadh did not cover the evidence of his crime well, and Caradawg soon learned who had killed Kwerdhyl. All his anger toward Kwerdhyl disappeared, and he and a band of soldiers furtively entered the lands of the Deceangli and killed Eurneadh. Returning home, Caradawg soon found himself haunted by the spirit of his former lover, for she had become a dhoat, a restless spirit who died suddenly far from home and who is driven to return there. She appeared to him in the evenings and entreated him to let her inside, but he

BOOK OF SECRETS: RUNNING THE GOTHIC EARTH

refused, believing she wanted only to kill him. Finally, after several months, he relented and opened the doors to her. She entered her father's home and realized that her corporeal body would have to be brought there as well for her to be finally at rest. Frustrated, she embraced her former lover, slowly draining his personality until she released him, and, struck with madness, he ran out into the moors.

The following day he was found dead, his blank eyes staring into the sky. Well respected by the other leaders of the tribe, Caradawg was buried in a special tomb marked by a sacred mound.

Several decades later, Kwerdhyl was able to get her remains, which had been interred at Buxton, taken to the site of her father's home, but still her drive to go home was not fulfilled.

COMBAT

Incorporeal, Kwerdhyl can only be harmed by weapons with a bonus of at least +1 or by weapons made of oak wood. When such a weapon strikes her, it passes through her and she does not visibly react to the damage caused, but she does take damage normally. When she is reduced to fewer than 10 hit points, she turns invisible and attempts to flee. (She can turn invisible at will.) If she is reduced to fewer than 0 hit points, she is destroyed for 12 hours, after which she reappears, with all hit points restored, at the site of her physical remains. Kwerdhyl can be turned as a mummy except when she is within 10' of her physical remains, at which times she can be turned as a ghost.

Kwerdhyl can cast, at will, *spectral forces*, *hallucinatory terrain*, *dream*, and *nightmare*, and she uses these abilities to communicate her predicament to a selected target. As Kwerdhyl doesn't know what is required of her to escape her curse, her messages are often misinterpreted. If the target of her message refuses to help her or doesn't appear to be helping her, she uses her powers to harass him or her until she gets the target to cooperate. If her efforts continue to be unsuccessful, she will attack the target (typically when the target is asleep) and drain his or her Wisdom, attacking 1d4 times and draining 1d4 points of Wisdom for each successful attack. If the victim is awake, he or she may save vs. death magic after each attack to avoid losing ability points from that attack. Ability points lost in this manner cannot be regained for 8 days; after then, they return at a rate of 3 per day. If the target is reduced to 0 Wisdom points, he or she becomes unconscious for 8 days; then after he or she awakes and regains points of Wisdom at a rate of 1d3 per day.

PERSONALITY

For centuries, Kwerdhyl has roamed the English countryside recruiting the living to help her, and each time she has been disappointed. She understands only that she has an irresistible urge to return home. In 1529, she persuaded a young goatherd named Ellis to move her skeletal remains from where they'd been buried to the site of her father's home. He placed the bones in an oblong metal box and buried them four feet in the ground, but Kwerdhyl remained on earth. In anger, she sapped the youth's Wisdom and left him to die of exposure to the elements. After death, his spirit lingered and eventually merged with that of a black-furred wolf.

Kwerdhyl is forlorn and frustrated by her inability to remove her curse. She cannot speak, but she does understand Victorian English, as she's walked among those who speak it for many years. In the dreams she projects, she can speak, if she chooses, but typically she relies on images to convey her meaning, as she's simply out of the habit of speaking.

THE HAUNTED CAIRN

INTRODUCTION

This adventure is suitable for 3-5 low-level characters. It is set in Great Britain, primarily in the countryside east and south of Liverpool; however, a Dungeon Master could easily move the adventure to a different area in the British Isles or Northern Europe by changing the names of locations and the geographic details. *The Celts Campaign Sourcebook* (TSR#9376) provides information that may be helpful to Dungeon Masters who wish to alter the location of the adventure within Gothic Earth. The adventure could also easily be located within a domain of Ravenloft or in a non-RAVENLOFT setting by removing the trip by train and replacing it with transportation appropriate to the setting.

In this adventure, Kwerdhyl decides to try a different approach to solving her problem. Specifically, she decides to enlist two aides instead of just one; thus, she sends two dream messages to two different player characters in the hopes that the combined information might lead to the solution to her problem. The adventure begins in London, when the two heroes have their dreams. The following morning, the heroes travel by rail to Liverpool where they receive some warnings and clues about their adventure. The following day, they travel into the countryside to find the burial site of Kwerdhyl, encountering a black wolf and an unusual young girl along the way. If the heroes can put together the clues properly, they can solve the mystery of Kwerdhyl's curse and put her to rest. Otherwise, they'll just make her very angry.

BOOK OF SECRETS: RUNNING THE GOTHIC EARTH

This adventure is designed for inquisitive heroes. While there is some combat, the bulk of the adventure focuses on collecting the pieces of Kwerdhyl's puzzle and then putting them together. Heroes who don't take the time to ask questions of NPCs they encounter will not be able to complete the adventure successfully.

THE ADVENTURE BEGINS LONDON

The Dungeon Master should select two player characters to be recipients of Kwerdhyl's dream messages. The second of them should be someone whose background includes a friendly relationship with his or her father and who is not a brown-haired woman. Kwerdhyl has taken notice of the heroes because of their success at a previous adventure. She has the past decades been traveling to London to enlist people to help her, as she believes them to be more sophisticated than those in the area she normally haunts, and that sophistication may translate into insights to help her.

Read or show the following to the first dreamer:

The air is crisp, chilling you as it blows into your face. It's just before dawn, and you're standing on a high hill, looking across the English countryside. Liverpool is behind you. In the distance, you can see a figure—a woman, though it's too far for you to make out any detail other than that she wears a bearskin cloak. She glows slightly with a deep blue aura. Suddenly, she clasps her hands together as if she's praying or pleading. The sun rises in front of you, slightly to your left, and the woman disappears. In front of you is a metal box a foot wide and an arm's-length long.

Read or show the following to the second dreamer:

You are surrounded by fog. You hear a howling in the distance, like that of a forlorn hound. You move forward and feel the ground crunching beneath you as you step. There are trees around you now, and you slow down to keep from tripping over their gnarled roots. You hear panting behind you, and you move faster. Suddenly, a vine grasps your arm and pulls streams of blood from your skin as you pull away. You come to a familiar door, open it, and run inside. Just as you slam the door shut, you hear and feel a great crash upon it, and then a sinister growl. You put your back to the door to support it, and doing so you look into the mirror behind you. You're a brown-haired woman wearing a bearskin cloak. The blood on your arm slowly disappears, and you regain your breath. The growling stops, and your sense of danger ebbs. A great

feeling of peace overwhelms you. You look around and recognize your father's home, and you know you are safe.

The other heroes will have slept undisturbed (presumably). In the morning, the dreamers must share their dreams or the Dungeon Master will have to have some other adventure ready. The heroes can catch a train to Liverpool at 11 AM, giving them time to procure any supplies they may need for the trip. Train fare is 20 shillings per person, and the trip takes five hours.

LIVERPOOL

The heroes will reach Liverpool by late afternoon. If they ask the porter or anyone at the train station for lodging information, they'll be directed to the Blackern Inn and Pub, which is about three miles from the station. A tall, gangly youth named Merry will volunteer to take them to the inn on the back of his horse-drawn hay-trailer, asking a fee of a half-penny to a half-shilling depending on how wealthy the heroes look.

If the heroes don't take the ride, then a second option is a stable nearby the station, where the heroes can rent horses to take them out to the inn. The cost for each rider is 1 shilling, although Talbot, the stable manager, is likely to lower the rate to a half-shilling for a flirtatious female rider (but not any of her companions).

The heroes' third option is to walk to the inn. There are various other places they could visit in thriving Liverpool, and the Dungeon Master can flesh out some of these locations as needed, but the heroes should be subtly steered to the inn to continue with this adventure.

If they choose to ride with Merry or rent horses from Talbot, Merry or Talbot tells them:

"You have to be careful out in the countryside these days, as the ghostwolf has been howling, and we all know that means trouble. Quite a few of the townfolk are out hunting him now, though they're not going to find anything."

If the heroes ask, Merry or Talbot answers questions as follows:

What is the ghostwolf? "It's a great black wolf that hunts in the low mountains and forests to the east."

Why does that mean trouble? "The ghostwolf doesn't hunt animals, they say; it hunts people."

Why won't the townfolk find anything? "The ghostwolf's been around for years. It's no ordinary beast; it can't be. It's some kind of ghost or demon."

Have you ever seen the ghostwolf? "No, but my grandfather told me he saw it once, said it growled at him from across the river and then disappeared into the brush.

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He said its fur was all black, but its eyes were a-glowing yellow. Of course, grandfather was a little prone to exaggeration, but still . . .”

BLACKERN INN AND PUB

However they get to the inn, the heroes approach it along a stone walkway that extends from the road. The Inn is a two story, brown building with numerous small windows along its facade. As the heroes approach, the second dreamer notices a face watching him or her from one of the upstairs windows, the same face he or she saw in the mirror of his or her dream. As soon as Kwerdhyl knows that she’s been seen, she turns invisible.

The owner and manager of the Blackern Inn and Pub is Nigel McAltney, and he welcomes the heroes as they approach. He’s a short, thin, jovial man in his late fifties. Travelers have not been frequent of late, and Nigel is happy to have some business. He offers each of the heroes a single room (7s./night), but he does have double rooms (10s./night) available if the heroes ask about them. The room fee includes breakfast at 9 a.m. and dinner at 6 p.m. If the heroes have rented horses from Talbot, Nigel suggests they put the horses in the inn’s stable where Talbot can retrieve them the next day.

If the heroes ask Nigel about the ghostwolf, read or paraphrase the following:

“The ghostwolf? Who’ve you been talking to, my friends? It’s true there’s a wolf out there, probably more than one, and it’s been bothering the livestock. But there’s nothing supernatural about it. It’s just a wolf. They’re unusual around here, but they appear from time to time.”

If the heroes mention that Merry or Talbot told them about the ghostwolf, he remarks, “You can’t believe everything you hear, particularly from those with a touch of the Celtic in them. You mark my words, that wolf is no ghost.”

If the heroes ask what “a touch of the Celtic” means, then read or paraphrase the following:

“That’s just an old saying we use around here. Every now and again, one of the townsfolk or sometimes travelers are found out in the countryside, and they’ve become addled, confused. After about a week they usually regain themselves, and some of them talk about the spirit of a Celtic woman who haunted them and tried to steal their soul. Of course, that’s probably still their confusion talking. If you ask me, it was probably just the spirits from a bottle that did it to them, but then I’m not as superstitious as most folk, being the good servant of Christ that I am.”

If the heroes ask about the woman one of them saw in the window, Nigel suggests it might have been the chambermaid, but otherwise no one would be upstairs, as none of the rooms are let out.

Nigel can also confirm that there were Celtic settlements throughout the surrounding countryside if he’s asked, but he’s never been much interested in Celtic legends and he doesn’t know anything more about the Celts.

ASLEEP AT THE INN

After the heroes have turned in for the evening, read or show the following to the first dreamer:

The air is warm. You’re in a cave, a small, humid cave. Wisps of feathery fog dance slowly around you. The woman in the bearskin cloak kneels before you, praying or perhaps crying. She looks down at the ground, not up at you. Suddenly, her face rises. Her light brown hair is wet and plastered to her forehead; her eyes are bulging. She stands and then falls toward you, her blue eyes twisting upward. Behind her stands a thin man, his eyes filled with jealous anger and a bloodied dagger in his hands. He looks up at you as if in surprise. Suddenly, he lies dead at your feet, his stiffening hand grasping at the gaping sword wound in his chest. The camp is on fire around you, and tribesman run about in the night, gathering their belongings and trying to escape the flames. Your eyes are pulled back to the corpse in front of you; its eyes open suddenly, its dirty forefinger points east, and its mouth utters a name: “Caradawg.”

Read or show the following to the second dreamer:

You are surrounded by fog. You hear a howling in the distance, like that of a forlorn hound. You move forward and feel the ground crunching beneath you as you step. There are trees around you now, and you slow down to keep from tripping over their gnarled roots. You hear panting behind you, and you move faster. You come to a familiar door, the door to your father’s home, but it’s locked. You pound on it, but there is no response. Moving around to the side, you peer through a window. There is your father, sitting in his comfortable chair, his head twisted unnaturally to the side. He’s dead. A face appears in the window, a familiar face, your lover. He’s wearing your father’s robes, and he snarls at you, beckoning you to leave, beckoning you to return to your exile. You beg him to let you inside, but he is too proud and he won’t let you in. You sink to your knees, weeping.

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MORNING IN LIVERPOOL

The next day the heroes are awakened early by a distant howling coming from the southeast.

The heroes are provided a mediocre breakfast of eggs and ham prepared by Lucinda, the matronly chambermaid/cook/waitress of the inn. Lucinda is not talkative, as she's concerned that her son did not return the night before after being out hunting the black wolf. If someone mentions the ghostwolf to her, she looks startled, crosses herself, and retreats to the kitchen.

While the heroes are eating, Talbot arrives; if she has not already done so, Lucinda retreats to the kitchen. If the heroes rented horses from Talbot the day before, he approaches them and asks if they'll need the horses further. If the heroes didn't rent horses the previous day, Talbot introduces himself and indicates that he's got horses for rent stabled at the inn. He asks the heroes if they wish to rent them for the day. He relates the following information:

“Seems there was an accident yesterday, off to the east, near the Haunted Cairn. Some lads riding fell into the ravine, didn't even see it there until they were on it, they said, then suddenly it was there. Lost three mares, they did, so they may be looking for new mounts. So, if you won't be needing my horses, I'll be taking them back to my stables.”

If asked about the Haunted Cairn, Talbot replies that it's some ancient burial mound where folks say a druid princess appears on nights of the new moon. He's not seen this ghost himself.

If the heroes want to keep the horses, Talbot collects their payments for the next two days and bids them well.

If the heroes do not want to keep the horses, Talbot bids them well and goes to the inn's stables. Moments later, he rushes back into the tavern and confronts the heroes, his face ashen:

“What've you done to my horses?! Their eyes are glowing red and they're snorting fire! Witches! Demons!”

After his accusation, he runs from the inn and back toward his stables.

If the heroes investigate the stables, the horses all appear normal, if a little nervous. Nigel appears and warns them that he's heard there was a riding accident the previous evening and that they should be careful if they ride eastward toward the Haunted Cairn.

If asked about the Haunted Cairn, Nigel replies that it's supposed to be an ancient burial mound from Celtic times, but it's really just a high knoll. He's never heard

about the ghost that haunts the mound, and he wouldn't believe in it even if he had heard of it.

If the players have not realized that their characters need to head east from Liverpool, Nigel could ask them to investigate the scene of the previous night's accident, as he suspects Lucinda's son may have been injured or killed.

JOURNEY TO THE CAIRN

The heroes should travel due east over hilly, dirt roads surrounded by forest of varying density. If they deviate significantly from this path, Kwerdhyl will use her illusions to direct them back to the path she wishes them to follow. After an hour's travel, each hero makes an Intelligence check at -1 (although anyone with sixth sense automatically succeeds). Those who are successful sense that they are being watched from the forests alongside the road.

Read or paraphrase the following:

Suddenly, a great black mass erupts from the trees and charges forward. It resembles a great wolf, larger than any you've ever seen, standing almost four feet tall at its shoulder. The horses spook as the wolf approaches.

The wolf is Ellis, the young goatherd who aided Kwerdhyl and later suffered her wrath. Merged with the spirit of a dead wolf, Ellis has become a spectral wolf, a unique creature whose sole purpose is to thwart Kwerdhyl's finding peace. At this point, Ellis is unaware of Kwerdhyl's contacts with the heroes, so his intent is only to scare them away from Kwerdhyl's remains. In a round, he reaches the closest heroes, and all heroes within 20 feet of him must make fear checks; all affected horses automatically fail their fear checks. Any heroes on a spooked horse must succeed a Dexterity check to remain mounted.

Spectral Wolf (1): AC 2; MV 15; HD 4; hp 18; THACO 16; #AT 1; dmg 2d4 + 1 point of Strength; SA fear aura; SD iron or enchanted weapon to hit, undead; SW repulsed by human bones; SZ M (5' long); ML Very Steady (13-14); Int Average (8-11); AL NE; XP 420

Notes: Ellis leaves no trail (treat as permanent *pass without trace* spell). Characters that come within 20' of Ellis must make a fear check at -2. When confronted by human bones, Ellis withdraws in revulsion; he will not willingly come within 5' of exposed human bones, including those of anyone he has attacked. Should a victim's bones become exposed, Ellis stops his attack and chooses another target or flees. Strength points lost to Ellis' attacks are regained at a rate of 1 point per hour of non-strenuous activity. Ellis can only be struck by weapons

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made of iron or weapons which have been magically enchanted. Ellis has the usual undead immunity to *charm*, *sleep*, and related spells. Spells that target animals (e.g., *Speak with animals*) have no effect on him, although similar spells that target undead (e.g., *Speak with undead*) will work. If destroyed, Ellis will reform after 24 hours unless the weapon that delivered the damage that killed him was a human bone.

After causing havoc, Ellis flees into the woods, leaving no evidence that he was ever present.

THE WISE CHILD

Heroes on horses will reach the next encounter in an hour, but heroes on foot will not reach it for four hours after the encounter with the spectral wolf.

Coming over the top of a hill, you see in the road ahead what appears to be a young girl. She's wearing a light blue dress over black britches. Looking closer, you can see that her dress is actually a man's shirt that is too big for the child. She's looking away from you, toward the east.

If the player characters continue forward, the girl will hear them and turn to face them. Her face is dirty, and she wears no shoes or socks. She grins at anyone who approaches her in a non-threatening manner. Anyone who looks closely into her face may notice that she has one green eye and one blue eye.

The girl's name is Emily, and she's 7 years old and very lively. She was riding with her brother the night before; however, during a rest, she had wandered into the woods, and when she returned her brother and his companions were gone. Her brother had been hunting the ghostwolf, and he often let her ride with him when he went on hunts, as their parents are both dead. She's sure her brother (Patrick Branwell) will return for her soon. If asked what she did through the night, then she relates the following:

I tried to stay up as long as I could waiting for Patrick to come get me, but I got sleepy so I took a nap on a tall hill. And when I woke up, there was a man there, and he said he was watching over me, so I said thank you and asked him if he'd seen my brother and he said no that he hadn't and then he said I should head down the road to get back home and then I laughed and told him that's not where my home is and he looked very sad, so I thanked him again for watching over me and then I started coming down this road!

If the heroes ask if the man told her his name, she says his name is Prince Carry-Dog.

If the heroes ask her where her home is, she replies that it's with her brother, because he's the person she loves the most. "And where is your home?" she'll ask her questioner.

Emily hasn't seen Ellis or Kwerdhyl. She hasn't made a great deal of progress either, as she frequently has left the road to go exploring in the woods, and when she returned to the road, she wasn't sure which direction she'd been going in. She also doesn't want to stray too far away from where her brother left her, as that's where she expects he'll retrieve her.

If the heroes suggest that Emily accompany them, promising to help her find her brother, she readily agrees. If they decide to abandon a 7-year-old child and continue their journey without her, then make them all roll power checks, and then Emily will ask them to take her along; the remainder of this adventure assumes that they do.

Emily can direct the heroes to the Haunted Cairn (her "tall hill"), but Caradawg's ghost is not present.

The cairn is a hill approximately five feet tall and twenty-five feet in circumference (at ground level). It's covered with fine grass and is otherwise unremarkable. It could, conceivably, be a natural formation, but it is, in fact, Caradawg's burial mound. Beneath two feet of dirt is a mound of stones, and beneath the stones are the deteriorating remains of Caradawg. The Celt's spirit is tied to this place, but on rare occasions he is able to communicate with certain "gifted" humans, such as Emily. (Emily is the only person who can communicate with Caradawg during this adventure.)

Digging into the cairn will take about an hour with a shovel, 20 minutes with 2-3 shovels. An additional 15-20 minutes will be needed to remove the stones enough to be able to see into the cairn (aided by a light source) and see Caradawg's skeleton beneath.

Kwerdhyl, while respectful of her lover's cairn, will not long tolerate the heroes' dawdling there while she needs them to complete their mission. She will appear and direct the heroes east and away from the cairn, toward the site of her remains. Emily will be able to see Kwerdhyl if she appears, and she might remark, "She's dressed like Prince Carry-Dog was. She even looks like him, in a sort of way."

If the heroes didn't ask Emily to guide them to the cairn, then Kwerdhyl continues to steer them directly to her remains.

THE REMAINS

Kwerdhyl's physical remains are about half a mile east of the Haunted Cairn. There, Kwerdhyl leads the heroes off the road and south into the forest. After a short trek, they come to a clearing approximately 25 feet in diameter. Yellow grass 2 to 3 feet tall grows in the clearing, but the heroes can make out easily enough an old shovel stuck in

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the ground in the middle of the clearing and the skeleton of a youth lying near the western edge of the clearing.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The ghostly woman stands in the middle of the clearing, great sadness flowing from her face. She points deliberately to the ground beneath her and then at the shovel beside her.

“She wants to go home,” Emily says.

If the heroes ask where “home” is, Emily replies, “She doesn’t know. She just wants to be there.” If the heroes specifically ask Emily where her own home is, she replies as previously: “It’s with my brother, because he’s the person I love the most.”

Kwerdhyl will continue to gesture toward the ground until the heroes realize they’re supposed to dig up her remains. If anyone tries to leave, she blocks his or her path with illusionary vines and tree limbs.

After about 20 minutes, the heroes unearth the metal box containing Kwerdhyl’s remains. The 3’ x 1’ box appears to be made of dented tin and is tied shut with deteriorated rope. Inside are Kwerdhyl’s bones, stored in a pile but all remarkably well preserved.

As soon as the heroes find the box but before it is opened, Ellis attacks from the woods. He bounds to the digging, and attacks the closest person, fighting until he’s destroyed. If the box is opened, Ellis backs away from the bones but will continue to menace the heroes, looking for a way to attack without coming near the bones. Heroes can also use the bones of the skeleton to scare off Ellis, those being even more effective because they’re his own.

Once Ellis has been defeated or run off, the heroes have, at most, an hour to figure out what they’re going to do with Kwerdhyl’s bones. After then, she becomes impatient with them and starts lashing out at them, draining Wisdom in her fury. So long as the heroes retain possession of her remains, Kwerdhyl will continue to haunt them. If the remains are reburied, Kwerdhyl will leave in frustration. If the heroes come up with a plan and it sounds even remotely reasonable, Kwerdhyl will break off her attack and let them do what they can. Destroying her remains doesn’t sound at all reasonable; in fact, if her remains are completely destroyed, then she will never be able to return them home.

If Kwerdhyl’s remains are placed in the cairn with Caradawg’s, then both of their spirits are put to rest. The cairn does not have to be resealed; minutes after the lovers are reunited, the cairn will cave in on itself, sealing Caradawg’s and Kwerdhyl’s remains from the outside world forever.

LOOSE ENDS

If the heroes did not help Kwerdhyl reach home, then she will continue to seek mortals to aid her. She has no interest in pursuing vengeance against the heroes, although if they decide to hunt for her, she will readily take measures to defend herself.

If the heroes return to Liverpool with Emily, they could encounter her brother there, or the Dungeon Master could use searching for her brother as a lead-in to another adventure. Alternatively, the heroes could learn that her brother has died, and then they have to figure out what to do with her now that she has no family. The heroes may also be interested in investigating the accident at the ravine and in searching for Lucinda’s son. It could be that Kwerdhyl was using her *hallucinatory terrain* power to guide the hunters away from the field containing her remains and into a convenient ravine. Or something even more sinister could be at work.

Unless the heroes figured out Ellis’ weakness, he is probably still around, and he will be angry with the heroes, particularly if they helped Kwerdhyl. If he can no longer keep Kwerdhyl from escaping her earthly bonds, he may decide to help the heroes escape theirs. Unless the heroes were able to communicate with Ellis when they first encountered him, it’s unlikely they’ll understand the spectral wolf’s relationship with Kwerdhyl.



SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE RED DEATH

PART TWO:

Being an Account of the Life and Career of the Great Detective
on Gothic Earth, Following the Great Hiatus Through
the Close of the Nineteenth Century

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INTRODUCTION

"The observer who has thoroughly understood one link in a series of incidents, should be able accurately to state all the other ones, both before and after."

—**Sherlock Holmes**
"The Five Orange Pips"
Adventures of Sherlock Holmes

In this installment of the *Sherlock Holmes and the Red Death* series, the life and career of the Great Detective from the period after the Great Hiatus to the close of the nineteenth century is fully examined. Starting with the return of Sherlock Holmes from his presumed death at the hands of Professor James Moriarty, the Forbidden Lore behind some of the famous cases of the Canon as put down on paper by Dr. John H. Watson is again revealed. This time, full NPC write-ups of the prominent villains of the Canon are provided for use in a Masque of the Red Death campaign set in Victorian London. Other interesting tidbits related to the Canon are included as well to add

further detail, including information on a famous weapon seen in the Canon and a new magical item for Gothic Earth.

As in the first installment, this article attempts to address some of the differences and discrepancies between the Sherlock Holmes of literature and the Sherlock Holmes of Gothic Earth. While intended primarily for Dungeon Masters, player characters with the Forbidden Lore proficiency might be privy to the information contained within at the DM's discretion. As before, this article may be used to provide adventure ideas for heroes with the Detective kit for tradesmen in the Masque of the Red Death horror roleplaying setting.

With the return of Sherlock Holmes and his reunion with Dr. John Watson, rest assured that the safety of the citizens of Gothic Earth is once again in capable hands!

THE RETURN OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

"Well, you're not a spirit anyhow!"

—**Dr. John Watson**
"The Adventure of the Empty House"
The Return of Sherlock Holmes

For three years following that fateful day in May of 1891 when Sherlock Holmes and Professor James Moriarty

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clashed at the Reichenbach Falls, the entire world assumed the Great Detective had been killed in an epic confrontation of good and evil. His friend and chronicler, Dr. John Watson, was left to pick up the pieces and come to terms with his grief. Watson took up his pen for what he assumed would be the last time, and told the story of Holmes' demise, bringing a sense of closure not only for the public but himself as well. Returning to private medical practice, Watson turned his full attention to his loving wife Mary and a life of quiet, respectable anonymity.

Unfortunately the good doctor was not to be spared from further grief. In December of 1891, Mrs. Watson died suddenly from unknown causes, leaving Watson alone in the world and a shell of his former self. He found solace in his daily medical practice, which began to thrive with his constant attention, and he volunteered his services in the evening to the poor and indigent in London's East End. While this certainly kept him busy, he otherwise found no joy in day to day living nor pursued any personal interests as he had in the past.

On the evening of April 5, 1894, a momentous event occurred that meant a reversal of circumstance for the downtrodden Watson. While attempting to relax with the evening paper in the study of his Kensington house, he was startled by an unexpected knocking at the door. His maid informed him that a gentleman desired to see him, an elderly book collector he had met earlier that day by chance. Believing the man had come to see him for a consultation, Watson invited him in and got his medical bag. As the gentleman spoke, the tone and inflection of his voice suddenly changed to one he instantly and instinctively recognized. With a sense of uncertainty and overwhelming joy, Dr. John Watson realized that the gentleman before him was none other than his dear friend, Sherlock Holmes in one of his many disguises.

After an emotional reunion, Holmes and Watson sat down by the fire and the Great Detective told his friend the entire story of how he spent last three years while presumably dead. Holmes first recounted for Watson the events as they really took place at Reichenbach Falls, and how he faked his own death to allow him to dismantle the remainder of Professor Moriarty's criminal empire. He then gave an account of his journeys around the globe disguised as Olin Sigerson, a Norwegian explorer and mountain climber. As the tale came full circle to their joyous reunion, a solemn look of urgency came over his face, and Holmes brought Dr. Watson into his full confidence.

Holmes revealed to Dr. John Watson all he had learned over the last few years about the dark, evil presence known as the Red Death. He explained his association with the qabal known as Die Wächtern, and the alliance he had forged with Professor Abraham Van Helsing and Pope Leo XIII. He explained how his

mountain climbing adventures in Tibet as Sigerson were in fact a ruse to allow him to convey a message from the Holy Father to a sect of Buddhist monks that were also members of another qabal known as the Mahatmas. As Watson sat wide-eyed at the incredible tale, Holmes explained the dark reason as to why he was telling all his secrets.

With a look of utter sadness, Holmes informed Watson that the agents of Moriarty were responsible for the death of his wife. He explained that his original intention behind the Great Hiatus was to protect his friends and associates as he finished his battle with the Professor's criminal empire, but unbeknownst to him at the time, he had been observed walking away from Reichenbach by Moriarty's second-in-command, Colonel Sebastian Moran. Holmes next told Watson that he was finally ready to spring the trap to bring Moran to justice, and asked his friend to join him once again. Without hesitation, the doctor accepted his offer, and by the end of the week, Watson sold his practice and Kensington home, and moved back in to his old room at 221 B Baker Street, which had been preserved exactly as Holmes had left it three years earlier.

The story of Sherlock Holmes' return may be found in "The Adventure of the Empty House" by Arthur Conan Doyle in the collection *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*. For further information on the Great Hiatus, please see "The Truth behind the Great Hiatus" in *Sherlock Holmes and the Red Death Part One* (available in *The Book of Sorrows* netbook published in 1998). Some of Holmes actions during the Great Hiatus will be chronicled in "A Penny Dreadful", a serial fiction tale that will accompany the Kargatane's open-ended netbook, *Crossroads of the Gothic Earth*). See also the entry for "The Adventure of the Empty House" in the "Forbidden Lore of the Canon" section below.

FORBIDDEN LORE OF THE CANON

"It is a mistake to confound strangeness with mystery. The most commonplace crime is often the most mysterious . . ."

—**Sherlock Holmes**
A Study in Scarlet

This section continues the documentation of the unrevealed supernatural and occult occurrences within the published cases of the Great Detective that was started in *Sherlock Holmes and the Red Death Part One* (available in *The Book of Sorrows*). For the sake of convenience, the cases are presented in the form of a timeline, and for the sake of completeness, cases that transpired as written

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by Dr. John H. Watson without any associated Forbidden Lore are included as well. No attempt is made to summarize the events of the cases as published by Watson, and the reader is referred to the actual stories in the Canon, or to other secondary sources for a synopsis (see “References” below). At the continued request of Holmes, Watson has refrained from bringing to light this confidential and mysterious information in his published accounts of these cases for the sake of the public good. Because of this necessity, the astute reader may notice a few differences in detail between the cases as presented in the Canon and the Forbidden Lore accounts of how they actually transpired on Gothic Earth. This section only presents Forbidden Lore from cases that took place after the Great Hiatus until the end of the nineteenth century.

Note: The exact dates of the cases of Sherlock Holmes have long been the subject of debate by Holmesian and Sherlockian scholars. The dates used in this list are taken from *Encyclopedia Sherlockia* by Matthew E. Bunson (see “References” below). While this author does not necessarily agree with the accuracy of all these dates, they are perhaps the best and most logical choice for a campaign set on Gothic Earth.

1894, April 5: “The Adventure of the Empty House”,
The Return of Sherlock Holmes

Forbidden Lore

Colonel Sebastian Moran, who assumed leadership of Professor Moriarty’s criminal empire after the latter’s demise at the hands of Sherlock Holmes, was in fact a weretiger. At the intervention of Mycroft Holmes, Moran was spared execution by hanging after his criminal trial and instead handed over to the Diogenes Club in an attempt to research cures for pathologic lycanthropy. Sherlock Holmes admonished his brother for this action, stating that Moran was irredeemable long before he contracted the contagion that transformed him into a weretiger. It is unknown if the Diogenes Club has been successful in their research on pathological lycanthropy. If so, they have yet to share their findings with Holmes or his Die Wächtern allies.

For additional information, see “The Return of Sherlock Holmes” above, and the entry for Colonel Sebastian Moran in the “Villains of Gothic Earth: NPCs of the Canon” section below.

1894, November: “The Adventure of the Golden Pince-Nez”, *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*

Forbidden Lore

In the investigation of this case, Holmes became involved in an internal conflict between members of a Russian cell of a qabal known only as the Brotherhood. Very little is known about the Brotherhood, but it Holmes believed it may be a descendant of an order known as the Brotherhood of the Azure Robes, a lawful neutral qabal believed lost to antiquity. Qabalist Anna Coram was dispatched to Yoxley Old Place in Kent to eliminate the threat presented by a defector from the qabal, her estranged husband Professor Coram. The Professor had left Russia with many secret magical texts and artifacts belonging to the Brotherhood, which he intended to use for his own selfish ends.

Tragically, the curse associated with her magical golden pince-nez glasses resulted in the unfortunate murder of Professor Coram’s assistant, Willoughby Smith. Her eyes were deceived into believing that the unarmed man was in fact threatening her with a knife, and she plunged a letter opener she grabbed from a nearby desk into his throat in self-defense. Only when the victim pulled the pince-nez from her face as he fell to the floor did she realize the truth of the situation and quickly fled the house. In a brilliant example of his deductive method, Holmes was able to identify the murderer and her involvement with the Brotherhood, along with the magical nature of the golden pince-nez, by an examination of the glasses found clenched in the murder victim’s hands. In an effort to protect the Brotherhood from further security leaks, Anna Coram took her own life with a small vial of poison when Sherlock Holmes confronted her with the facts of the case.

For more information about the golden pince-nez, see the description for this magical item and its associated curse in the “Details, Details . . .” section below. The Brotherhood of the Azure Robes is referenced in the “Heirs of Defiance” chapter of *The Gothic Earth Gazetteer*.

1895, April: “The Adventure of the Three Students”,
The Return of Sherlock Holmes

1895, April: “The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist”,
The Return of Sherlock Holmes

1895, July: “The Adventure of Black Peter”, *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*

Forbidden Lore

In his efforts to clear the name of John Hopley Neligan in the murder of Captain Peter Carey, Holmes stumbled upon a power struggle between the leaders of two opposing werebeast clans. The murder victim, known in nautical circles about the London docks as the infamous

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Black Peter, was in fact a wereshark whose clan was engaged in an all out territorial war in the English Channel and North Sea with rival wereseals. The true murderer, Patrick Cairns, was a member of the wereseal faction sent to eliminate Black Peter, which he did quite effectively by impaling him with a silver-tipped harpoon from the victim's own collection. Unfortunately, Cairns managed to escape shortly after his leaving 221 Baker Street while under arrest, diving into the Thames River as he transformed into hybrid form right before the horrified eyes of two of London's finest. The two unfortunate Bobbies are still recuperating at Bedlam Hospital.

1895, August: "The Adventure of the Norwood Builder", *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*

1895, November: "The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans", *His Last Bow*

1896, October: "The Adventure of the Veiled Lodger", *The Case Book of Sherlock Holmes*

1896, November: "The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire", *The Case Book of the Sherlock Holmes*

Forbidden Lore

No other case in the Canon as published by Dr. John Watson better exemplifies Holmes' desire to protect the public from the knowledge that such supernatural creatures as vampires do in fact exist. At the bequest of Sherlock Holmes, Watson portrayed the Great Detective as believing such occult phenomena to be nonsense, mere superstition that could be explained away scientifically after thorough investigation. Therefore, the resulting published case in no way resembles the actual facts as they truly unfolded.

The legal firm of Morrison, Morrison, and Dodd referred a wealthy client of theirs to Sherlock Holmes regarding a case of apparent vampirism involving the gentleman's second wife. Previously, Holmes was retained by this firm to investigate the fate of the ship *Matilda Briggs* while in Indonesia in the mysterious unpublished case of the Giant Rat of Sumatra. Their client, Robert Ferguson of the tea brokers Ferguson & Muirhead, met the woman who became his new wife while conducting business in Latin America. Upon investigation of the Ferguson case, Holmes discovered that it was not a vampire at work in Sussex but an entirely new threat.

Holmes' investigations revealed that Ferguson's wife and her personal maid were not members of the undead as believed, but belonged instead to a mysterious race known as "vampyres." Like the dreaded nosferatu,

vampyres also fed on human blood for sustenance, and could easily be mistaken for creatures of the night by their behavior. The two female vampyres journeyed from their native Peru to England to escape their pack and find new feeding grounds to exploit. The vampyres, living off the blood of Ferguson and his son by his first wife, fiercely attacked Holmes after he revealed their true nature to the victims, but Watson dutifully stepped in with his service revolver, ending the threat they presented. Holmes later consulted with Die Wächtern about his discovery of the vampyre race, and the qabal has since sent agents to Peru and other areas in Latin America to investigate this phenomenon further. It is important to note that Dr. Watson made no reference to the case of the Giant Rat of Sumatra in his published account of the events in Sussex on Gothic Earth.

More information about the Great Rat of Sumatra and other undocumented cases of the Canon will be presented in the third installment of the *Sherlock Holmes and the Red Death* series.

1896, December: "The Adventure of the Missing Three-Quarter", *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*

1897, January: "The Adventure of the Abbey Grange", *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*

1897, March: "The Adventure of the Devil's Foot", *His Last Bow*

Forbidden Lore

Fearing for the health and sanity of his friend, Dr. Watson convinced Sherlock Holmes to accompany him to a small cottage in Cornwall near Poldhu Bay for a relaxing month's holiday. As is so often the case, there is never any true rest for the ever-vigilant defenders of good, and Holmes subsequently became involved in this adventure, also known colloquially as the Cornish Horror. The entire Cornish region was one of steep black cliffs along the shore, and quaint, antiquated villages nestled between the fog-swept and dun-colored moors inland. While the setting was idyllic, the ancient monoliths and tors that dotted the countryside hinted at a darker past. It thus came as no surprise to the Great Detective when the vicar of the small hamlet of Tredannick Wollas came to him one morning with a sense of urgency and alarm.

The vicar reported an incident in his parish that left one woman dead and her two brothers driven to madness. Holmes and Watson accompanied the clergyman to the scene of the disturbance, a small cottage belonging to the unfortunate family. Upon examination of the body, Holmes noticed that the woman's face was frozen in a death mask of extreme terror. Watson

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observed her two brothers at the St. Basil's, a local hospital for the insane, and reported to Holmes their nightmarish visions of a six-tentacled horror that materialized out of a strange, dense mist while they sat at the kitchen table of their home. Upon examining the evidence, Holmes realized that something evil was at work, and the brothers' account was more than the ravings of madmen.

After wiring his trusted ally Professor Abraham Van Helsing, Holmes determined that an undead entity known as a mist horror was responsible for the strange occurrence that had baffled the local police. This malignant essence struck once more, killing another relative of the family involved in the first incident. Whatever its agenda was it must have been met, for it never made another appearance for the remainder of time the Great Detective and Dr. Watson resided in Cornwall.

It should be noted that in the published account of this case, Dr. Watson substituted a rare pharmaceutical plant known as *Radix pedis diaboli*, or Devil's-foot root, as a more scientific cause of the Cornish Horror.

1898, July: "The Adventure of the Retired Colourman", *The Case Book of Sherlock Holmes*

1898, August: "The Adventure of the Dancing Men", *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*

1899, January: "The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton", *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*

Forbidden Lore

The villain of this case, Charles Augustus Milverton, was not only the most odious blackmailer of the English aristocracy in the late nineteenth century, but a wererat. Sherlock Holmes was convinced that Milverton, whom he considered the most dangerous man in London since the demise of Professor Moriarty, was becoming too powerful a minion of the Great Evil known as the Red Death, and if left unchecked, would soon become unstoppable. Fearing the involvement of his brother Mycroft and the Diogenes Club would result in the preservation of this evil creature's life as it had several years earlier in the case of Colonel Moran, Holmes decided this time to take matters into his own hands. Unlike the version of the story presented in the published account by his chronicler and friend Dr. James Watson, it was Sherlock Holmes who ended Charles Augustus Milverton's life, the good doctor contriving the story of the ruined noblewoman behind the revolver to protect his friend. Holmes had consulted his friend Professor Abraham van Helsing of Die Wächtern about the case, who presented the Great Detective with a case

containing six silver bullets. Inspector Lestrade later approached him about investigating the murder of Milverton on behalf of Scotland Yard, but Holmes promptly refused, explaining that the perpetrator had in fact done the world a great service.

For more information about Charles Augustus Milverton, please see his entry in "Villains of Gothic Earth: NPCs of the Canon" below.

VILLAINS OF GOTHIC EARTH: NPCs OF THE CANON

COLONEL SEBASTIAN MORAN

Weretiger, Neutral Evil

Armor Class	3	Str	17
Movement	12	Dex	16
Level/Hit Dice	6+2	Con	15
Hit Points	33	Int	13
THAC0	15	Wis	9
No. of Attacks	3 (hybrid) or 1	Cha	10
Damage/Attacks	1-4/1-4/1-12 (hybrid form) or by weapon type (human form)		
Special Attacks	Rake for 2-5/2-5 (hybrid form only)		
Special Defenses	Hit only by silver or +1 or better magical weapon, <i>animate dead</i> spell-like ability		
Magic Resistance	Nil		
Nonweapon Proficiencies:	Hunting, Marksmanship, Survival, Tracking		

"The second most dangerous man in London."

—from **Volume M of Sherlock Holmes's index of criminal biographies**
"The Adventure of the Empty House"
The Return of Sherlock Holmes

COMBAT

As a pathologic (infected) lycanthrope, Colonel Moran has only two lycanthropic forms, human and human/tiger hybrid.

In hybrid form, he can punch with each fist causing 1-4 points of damage. Using his strong claws, he can rake his opponent with each claw for 2-5 points of damage. His razor-sharp teeth can cause 1-12 points of serious tearing damage, but he rarely uses this form of attack.

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In human form, Moran relies on traditional weapons. As a former army man and a big game hunter, he is proficient in the army pistol, the rifle, and Von Herder's air gun (see the entry for Von Herder's Air Gun in the "Details, Details . . ." section below).

Moran also possesses the spell-like ability to *animate dead*, which he can only use to create monster zombies from the hunting trophies he prepares in his taxidermy lab. This ability functions like the adept spell of the same name.

LAIR

After the demise of Professor Moriarty at the Reichenbach Falls, Colonel Moran was granted a lair of evil to accompany his rise from demilord to lord status. Moran's lair is his residence on Conduit Street, and it is also the location of The Anglo-Indian, a London social club for English gentleman and big game hunters who have resided in India for a substantial portion of their lives or careers.

The many hunting trophies of stuffed tigers and other animals native to India that are showcased at The Anglo-Indian are in fact well-preserved monster zombies (see the *Monstrous Manual* entry under *Zombie*) that the Colonel has created in his taxidermy lab (see *Combat* above). These animated tigers are completely under the control of Colonel Moran, and remain inactive until he directs them to do otherwise. Moran will not hesitate to use them to defend himself or his lair from unwelcome visitors. These animated animal corpses cease to function outside of the building.

BACKGROUND

Colonel Sebastian Moran was born in London in 1840 the son of Sir Augustus Moran, C.B., who once served as the British minister to Persia. Raised in a life of privilege, Moran was introduced to the sport of big game hunting by his father at an early age, and traveled to many exotic locations on Gothic Earth as a youth in pursuit of the sport when he was not in session at Eton. Although hunting provided his primary enjoyment in life, as a teenager with nearly unlimited funds and running in an aristocratic crowd, he soon developed a love for high stake card games as well.

Moran attended university at Oxford, and upon graduating began a career in Her Majesty's Indian army as a member of the First Bangalore Pioneers. At first, he distinguished himself in the Jowaki Campaign, fought at Charasiab, Sherpur and Kabul in the Afghan Campaign, and subsequently rose to the rank of colonel. Afterwards he continued to serve in India for many years, and the opportunities that the local jungles provided for tiger hunting suited his lifestyle well. Unfortunately, he still

retained his love for card games as well, and a scandal involving his use of marked cards to swindle the son of a visiting British noble led to his forced retirement from the First Bangalore Pioneers regiment.

Afterwards, Colonel Moran remained in India for many years where he continued to hunt, and his record for tiger kills was unmatched. During this time he authored two books on big game hunting: *Heavy Game of the Western Himalayas* published in 1881 and *Three Months in the Jungle* which saw print in 1884. These books established him as an expert on the sport of tiger hunting, and wealthy gentleman from around the world retained his services for their expeditions. Moran took advantage of this situation to supplement his income further by luring these unsuspecting but wealthy gentlemen into his rigged card games.

In 1886 while on one of his routine expedition to hunt tigers, Colonel Moran began to stalk one beast that was unusually cunning in an almost humanlike way. More alarming was the fact that their rifles seemed unable to do any harm to the creature. The tiger proved too strong for the hunting party and in the end only Colonel Moran survived. Seeking vengeance, Moran continued to chase the animal into the city of New Delhi, where it disappeared into a sewer. The Colonel quickly crawled into the opening after it, and his life was changed forever.

The tiger that Moran and his party had been stalking was in fact a weretiger, a form of lycanthrope indigenous to India. Moran survived the ensuing attack, but the monster escaped, leaving the Colonel seriously wounded and infected with lycanthropy. By the next full moon, the Colonel experienced his first transformation into werebeast form. Rather than recoiling in horror at his fate, Moran was extremely ecstatic at the newly found power and possibilities available to him.

Colonel Sebastian Moran's newly enhanced criminal activities in India soon caught the attention of Professor James Moriarty, an ancient creature of evil known as a rakshasa and head of an international criminal organization headquartered in England. Moriarty was fascinated by the Colonel's weretiger form that was similar, if still inferior, to his own, and successfully recruited Moran into his organization, and brought him back to London. The Professor used the aristocratic Moran exclusively for high-class jobs that common criminals would be unable to successfully. His ability to blend in with the upper crust of society was an asset, and within a few short months Moriarty appointed Moran his chief of staff and second-in-command.

When Sherlock Holmes all out war against Professor Moriarty and his crime ring culminated at the cliff side of Reichenbach Falls, Colonel Moran witnessed the Professor's fatal plunge into the turbulent waters below. Enraged, Colonel Moran raised his rifle to take his revenge on the Great Detective, and just as he placed

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Holmes' deerstalker cap in his sights and pulled the trigger, he was knocked off balance by a silver fox that leapt upon him from the bushes. The shock of the unexpected attack caused him to transform into his weretiger hybrid form, and the silver fox shifted into a similar humanoid lycanthropic shape. In the vicious fight that ensued, Holmes managed to make his escape by faking his own death and embarking on the Great Hiatus. By the time the werefox broke off her attack and disappeared as quickly as she arrived, Holmes was gone and Moran was left in charge of Professor Moriarty's criminal empire.

During the period of Holmes' Great Hiatus, Colonel Moran continued to run the remnants of the Moriarty's organization, but the clandestine efforts of the presumed dead detective left the organization a shell of its former self. By the spring of 1894, Moran's arena of operations was limited to London's criminal underworld. Knowing that Sherlock Holmes would eventually reappear to finish the job, the Colonel bided his time and carefully planned for the ultimate revenge against the Great Detective.

For additional information on Colonel Sebastian Moran and his actions following the Great Hiatus, please see "The Return of Sherlock Holmes" and the entry for "The Adventure of the Empty House" in "Forbidden Lore of the Canon" above.

"The worst man in London."

—**Sherlock Holmes**, "The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton"
The Return of Sherlock Holmes

CHARLES AUGUSTUS MILVERTON

Wererat, Lawful Evil

Armor Class	6	Str	8
Movement	12	Dex	14
Level/Hit Dice	3+1	Con	9
Hit Points	17	Int	15
THAC0	17	Wis	9
No. of Attacks	1	Cha	6
Damage/Attacks	By weapon		
Special Attacks	Nil		
Special Defenses	Hit only by silver or +1 or better weapons		

Magic Resistance Nil

Nonweapon Proficiencies: Appraising, Forgery, Read/Write

COMBAT

In all three of his forms (human, ratman and giant rat), Milverton relies on a derringer pistol for protection. He prefers to avoid any physical confrontation, however, and when confronted with a superior force, he will assume giant rat form and attempt to scurry away through a hole in the wall or down the nearest sewer. Unlike regular wererats, normal weapons cannot hurt Milverton while in human form - only silver or +1 weapons will cause damage. He may also summon and control 2-12 giant rats at any time (see however the enhancement of this ability while in his lair of evil below).

LAIR

Milverton's lair of evil is his Hampstead residence of Appledore Towers. The cellar of his estate contains a direct connection to the sewers though a drainage pipe in the brick floor, providing a convenient escape route if he should ever need one. Within the confines of Appledore Towers, Milverton may summon and control 2-200 normal rats or twice the number of giant rats that a wererat may normally summon (4-24). In the guise of a plumber by the name of Escott, Sherlock Holmes became quite familiar with the layout of Appledore Towers while investigating the case. Holmes took advantage of the opportunity his plumber disguise presented by blocking up the sewer egress before his final confrontation with Milverton.

BACKGROUND

Sherlock Holmes was not exaggerating when he referred to Charles Augustus Milverton as "the worst man in London". Since his youth, Milverton had been a petty criminal from London's nefarious East End, born in poverty and turning to crime to reverse his fortunes. A short, slightly obese man with a plump, round and hairless face, Milverton soon realized that his talents lay not in mundane activities like burglary and pick pocketing, but in blackmail, a crime that he perfected to an art form.

Milverton amassed his great fortune by acquiring damaging letters written by wealthy members of the aristocracy from their servants and others close to the potential victim, and then used these to extort large sums of money for their return without a scandal. The price Milverton was willing to pay for these letters provided enough of an incentive for many such persons to steal the letters, but Milverton was not beyond making the would-be thief feel somehow wronged by the person to whom they belonged through subtle manipulation and planting

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false insecurities. With the letters in his hand, he then approached the victim with his demand for payment by a specified date, threatening to expose their contents to a person that shouldn't see them, such as a spouse or a business partner. If the victim failed to make payment, Milverton exposed the scandal contained within the letter without a hint of remorse for the resulting consequences.

Over the years, Milverton became the undisputed king of the blackmailers. He always managed to remain beyond the reach of the law because his victims were often unwilling to have their scandals publicly revealed. He face always seemed to retain an insincere smile, even when one of his victims who couldn't meet his terms begged him for mercy. It was this cold and cruel utter lack of compassion that attracted the attention of the Red Death one foggy London night in the fall of 1890.

In a dark alley in Limehouse, Milverton laughed as a young woman on the eve of her wedding pleaded with him not to expose the secret in her letters to her fiancé. She explained that her former lover was no longer in her life, and no good could come of exposing her youthful indiscretions. Through her tears, she claimed that her family had fallen on hard times, and was unable to come up with the large sum of money that Milverton demanded. In a last ditch effort, she fell at her blackmailer's feet without regard for the cold cobblestones beneath. Milverton only laughed harder, and removing his pocket watch from his vest, said as he glanced at the time "My dear, your fiancée already knows!" With a look of utter despair, the young woman pulled a derringer from her bag, held the barrel up to her head, and pulled the trigger. As her blood flowed down the sewer grate in the center of the alley, he turned and strolled away, whistling a cheery little tune.

Just as he turned the corner, the densest fog he had ever seen in London overcame him. He noticed a slight scarlet tint to the unnatural mist, and his heart pounded faster as he began to panic. As his portly form raced in circles through the streets and alleys of the East End, he could sense a strange transformation overcoming his body. His face began to sprout long whiskers, his nose twitched as it elongated, and his front teeth began to grow. His trousers ripped as a long, hairless tail sprouted from the base of his spine, and the fear of being seen in this hideous new form overtook him. Suddenly, he realized that he was back in the alley from which he had started, coming to a complete halt as he nearly tripped over the body of the unfortunate woman whose life he had just destroyed. As if by instinct, he removed the bloody manhole grating with his rat like paws and scurried off into the dark, dank sewer below.

Since that time, Charles Augustus Milverton has become fully accustomed to his wererat nature, reveling in the power it provides him. He delights in the opportunities for blackmail that both his giant rat and

ratman forms open up, as both provide him with access to places he would otherwise be unable to penetrate while in human form.

For additional information on Charles Augustus Milverton, see the entry for "The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton" in "Forbidden Lore of the Canon" above. Although Sherlock Holmes permanently ended the blackmailing career of Milverton in January 1899, *Dungeon Masters* may wish to use this NPC in their own campaigns set on Gothic Earth prior to this date.

IRENE ADLER

Werewolf, Chaotic Evil

Armor Class	2, 4 or 6	Str	9
Movement	24, 18 or 12	Dex	17
Level/Hit Dice	8+1	Con	11
Hit Points	45	Int	18
THACO	13	Wis	12
No. of Attacks	1	Cha	18
Damage/Attacks	1-2 (bite as silver fox), 2-12 (bite as vixen), or by weapon (derringer pistol)		

Special Attacks Charm

Special Defenses Silver or +1 weapons to hit

Magic Resistance Nil

Nonweapon Proficiencies: Singing, Appraising, Disguise, Forgery, Hide in Shadows, Move Silently, Open Locks, Pick Pockets, Read/Write

"To Sherlock Holmes she is always *the* woman."

—Dr. John Watson
"A Scandal in Bohemia"
Adventures of Sherlock Holmes

COMBAT

As with the other female members of the LeDuece family cursed with (maledictive) lycanthropy, Irene Adler is able to assume three distinct forms, each with different combat abilities.

Her first form is that of a normal silver fox. In this form, her Armor Class is 2 and her bite causes 1-2 points of damage.

The second form is that of the vixen, a hybrid between human and silver fox. In vixen form, Irene's Armor Class is 4 and her bite becomes more ferocious, inflicting 2-12 points of damage. Although other werewolves are able to transmit lycanthropy with their bite in vixen form, Irene is unable to do so.

Her third form is human form with an Armor Class of 6. She is only able to do damage with weapons when in

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this form. As a refined lady of some discretion, Irene befittingly carries a derringer pistol.

In human form, all male characters that see her must save vs. spell or be *charmed* (as the adept spell of the same name). Unlike regular werefoxes, Irene Adler has no magical resistance to *sleep* or *charm* spells, and unlike the other foxwomen of the LeDuce family, she is unable to cast spells. Instead, she has a variety of rogue nonweapon proficiencies at her disposal, but she may only use these in human form.

LAIR

As a free spirit affected by wanderlust, Irene Adler has yet to settle down long enough to be granted a lair of evil.

BACKGROUND

Irene Adler was born in 1858 in a provincial French village the daughter of Maurice LeDuce and his mistress. M. LeDuce was aware of the family curse that affected all the female members of the LeDuce family, which caused them to turn into a form of lycanthrope known as a werefox by their eighteenth birthday. Wishing to spare his daughter from this fate (and avoid the scandal that would ensue if his indiscretion were revealed), he placed his daughter up for adoption. It was his hope that by doing so, the curse would fail to take effect, especially if he could place his daughter as far away from France as possible. His agents in America were able to locate the Adlers, a kind, childless couple in New Jersey that was desperate to adopt a baby girl. Maurice LeDuce quickly made all the necessary arrangements, and sent his infant daughter to the United States. He never spoke of the incident again, but soon afterwards his mistress disappeared under questionable circumstances.

At first, the Adlers led the typical American middle class family life of the Victorian age. As Irene approached her teen years, however, she became increasingly difficult to control, stealing candy and toys from local shops and frequently running away from home. As a teenager, her disruptive behavior continued, but a newly discovered talent for singing allowed her to direct some of her energy in a more positive direction. The praise for her beautiful voice from the community seemed to please her, and her behavior seemed to improve for a time. Excited by this, her parents arranged for their adopted daughter to be trained in New York as an opera singer in the hopes that she would find some inner peace and self-control. Unfortunately, Irene perceived this to mean they had chosen to abandon her, and her anger towards them began to build into a primal rage within.

On the eve of her eighteenth birthday, Irene Adler returned for a visit to her family home in New Jersey at

the urgent request of her parents, who had not heard from their daughter in several months. Unbeknownst to Irene, whose anger at her parents caused her to rip up some of their letters unopened, her mother was too sick to leave the house, and her father was subsequently apprehensive about leaving his wife's side. Expecting to see her parents waiting for her at the station, and hoping that she may have been wrong in her assumptions, she became infuriated when she learned that a hired hansom cab was sent to pick her up instead. Seeing this as the final slight, Irene arrived at the front door of her home in a total rage. As the clock struck midnight and her eighteenth birthday arrived, Irene was suddenly overcome with a strange sensation as her body began to transform into that of a silver fox. With a newfound sense of power compounded by months of unexpressed rage, she raced through the house up to her parents' room, and attacked them with a cruel, vicious fury. When she was finished, her adoptive parents lay dead in a pool of blood, their corpses savagely torn to shreds.

The local authorities did not suspect foul play in the deaths of Irene's parents, believing instead that a wild animal had found its way from the woods into the home of the Adlers. Irene returned to New York after the funerals to resume her operatic training. Her contralto voice was so appealing to New York audiences that she soon was heralded as one of the most promising opera singers to emerge in years. After a series of acclaimed performances at New York City's Metropolitan Opera House, wanderlust overtook her and she departed for Europe. She toured the continent and gave many memorable performances at the great opera houses of Europe, including La Scala in Milan, Italy, and Covent Garden (the Royal Opera House) in London. At the height of her career, she held the position of Prima Dona of the Warsaw Imperial Opera in Poland. It was during this engagement that she became involved with Wilhelm Gottsreich Sigismund von Ormstein, the king of Bohemia, setting off the chain of events chronicled in "A Scandal in Bohemia".

In Europe, Irene Adler gained a considerable reputation not only as an opera singer but as an adventuress as well, with scandal seeming to follow her wherever she went. Still, she was readily able to charm herself out of any legal entanglements resulting from her exploits, and the public seemed to love her for it. Intelligent and wily, she even managed to outwit the Great Detective Sherlock Holmes, but found herself unable to successfully charm him into falling helplessly in love with her. Despite her failure to charm Holmes, he nevertheless allowed her to escape, and Irene found this gesture so gallant that she herself fell deeply and truly in love with him. To this day, Irene considers Sherlock Holmes under her personal protection, and on many occasions when on a dangerous case he has caught the

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graceful form of a silver fox watching over him as it paces the periphery. It is unknown if Holmes returns her affection, but it should be noted that while he has taken no action against this dangerous lycanthrope, he always carries a handful of juniper berries in his pocket.

For additional information on Irene Adler, please see the entry for “A Scandal in Bohemia” in the “Forbidden Lore of the Canon” section of *Sherlock Holmes and the Red Death Part One* (available in the *Kargatane Book of Sorrows* NetBook published in 1998). For more on the LeDuce family curse, please see the entry for Lady Michelle LeDuce in “Appendix II: Villains of Gothic Earth” in *A Guide to Gothic Earth* from the *Masque of the Red Death* campaign setting.

DETAILS, DETAILS . . .

“I am an omnivorous reader with a strangely retentive memory for trifles.”

—**Sherlock Holmes**
“**The Adventure of the Lion’s Mane**”
The Case Book of Sherlock Holmes

VON HERDER’S AIR GUN

“An admirable and unique weapon, noiseless and of tremendous power. . .”

—**Sherlock Holmes**
“**The Adventure of the Empty House**”
The Return of Sherlock Holmes

This extremely deadly weapon was constructed by a blind German mechanic named Von Herder and was commissioned by Professor Moriarty. Sherlock Holmes first encountered air guns when he began his all out assault on Moriarty’s crime ring in 1891. The air gun is basically a rifle with an attached canister of compressed air used for propelling a bullet at high velocity. Designed for use at long ranges, the damage effect on a target visibly appears to be similar to that of a normal weapon fired at very close range. This fact baffled the London police when it appeared that the Hon. Ronald Audaire had been shot at up close in a locked room that no assassin would be able to enter or escape. As Holmes later pointed out, Audaire had in fact been shot with an air gun

at long range through an open window. The air gun used by Colonel Moran in the murder of Ronald Audaire and the attempted murder of the Great Detective is currently on display in the Scotland Yard Museum. Although Holmes confiscated most of the air guns belonging to Moriarty’s henchmen, a few of these dangerous weapons still remain unaccounted for.

ROF	S/M/L	Rnds	Size	Type	Spd	Dmg ¹
1/1	35/50/75	1	M	P	4 ²	5d6

¹ Reroll and add any die roll of 6

² If loaded and ready, speed factor is 2

For additional information about firearms on Gothic Earth, please see “Chapter IV: Money and Equipment” in *A Guide to Gothic Earth* from the *Masque of the Red Death* campaign setting.

THE GOLDEN PINCE~NEZ

“It would be difficult to name any articles which afford a finer field for inference than a pair of glasses, especially so remarkable a pair as these.”

—**Sherlock Holmes**
“**The Adventure of the Golden Pince-Nez**”
The Return of Sherlock Holmes

The golden pince-nez glasses belonging to qabalist Anna Coram that she left behind at the murder scene of Willoughby Smith are in fact a magical item of some power. When this item is worn by any adept while studying a newly discovered spell, it functions as if *read magic* has been cast. This power functions up to three times a day and duration is determined by the current level of the adept. Gazing through the pince-nez allows an adept of 3rd level or higher to see magical energies and effects similar to the 1st level spell *detect magic*. This power only functions once a day but can be activated by the wearer at a time of their choosing. At 5th level, an adept wearing the pince-nez can activate them once a day to function as if they had cast the 2nd level spell *locate object*. The current level of the adept determines the duration and area of effect. Only members of the adept class can use this magical item. All powers are cumulative.

As with all magical items crafted on Gothic Earth after the arrival of the Red Death, the golden pince-nez also extract a price from any adept that wears them. Within one week of first donning the glasses, the adept’s eyesight becomes so poor that he or she becomes dependent on them for normal sight. After a month of

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wearing the pince-nez, the adept will experience occasional alterations of reality in what they see through the lenses. For example, a friendly handshake offered in friendship might appear to be an attack with a knife while wearing the glasses. The frequency of this occurrence is left to the Dungeon Master who is encouraged to use it for maximum dramatic effect.

It is unknown who (or what) created this magical item, but as Holmes observed when examining them, they are of high quality craftsmanship and of recent design.

For additional information, see the entry for “The Adventure of the Golden Pince-Nez” in the “Forbidden Lore of the Canon” section above.

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“I have no data. It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data.”

—**Sherlock Holmes**
“A Scandal in Bohemia”
Adventures of Sherlock Holmes

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- ❖ Michael Sherman's *221B Baker Street*
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- ❖ Les Moskowitz's *The Sherlockian Connection: Quotes from Sherlock Holmes*

My greatest fear in writing this article was that I had used up the best Sherlock Holmes quotes in its predecessor. I am especially indebted to this web site for proving me wrong.

<http://www.bcpl.net/~lmoskowi/HolmesQuotes/quotes.html>

COMING NEXT YEAR

Sherlock Holmes and the Red Death Part Three:

**Being an Account of the Life and Career of the Great
Detective on Gothic Earth, From the Turn of the
Century to the Start of The Great War**

Xe

WOLFGANG ARMAND FAUST

Those Who Do Not Learn From History Are Doomed To Repeat It

by Charles Phipps
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BIOGRAPHY

Faust has been an intriguing character in Gothic Earth's legends and literature for centuries, his tale including a pact with the Devil, tragic love affairs, and an attempt at redemption. However, only a few people on Gothic Earth know that the mage and pact-maker is indeed real and lives to this day, spreading both suffering and style with equal flair.

WOLFGANG ARMAND FAUST

13th-level Human Adept, Lawful Evil

Armor Class	7	Str	14 (8)
Movement	18	Dex	17 (9)
Level/Hit Dice	9	Con	14 (11)
Hit Points	27	Int	21
THAC0	16	Wis	12
No of Attacks	1	Cha	17 (9)
Damage/Attacks	By weapon or by spell type		
Special Attacks	Spells		
Special Defenses	See below		
Magic Resistance	None		

Note: Scores in parentheses are for Faust the Younger

APPEARANCE

Due to the unique nature of his curse, Faust changes greatly in appearance as the years pass, but his appearance generally falls under two categories: Faust the Younger and Faust the Elder.

Faust the Younger (as he appears when he first returns to this state) is an extremely handsome twenty-something German man with brown hair and a goatee, a mischievous twinkle in deep brown eyes, and angular

features. Always dressing in the latest fashions, Faust has a tendency to brag about his countless female conquests, his exquisite taste, and his knowledge.

Faust the Elder (as he appears when his age passes into his forties and beyond) gains a somber aura about him and begins to rapidly slow down his pace. Faust usually allows his beard to grow long and the beard soon takes a gray and eventually white tone. Faust the Elder tends to prefer utilitarian dress, and his eyes seem to belay great wisdom. Faust's voice deepens with age, and an increasingly vile disposition develops within his heart, evaporating when his youth is restored.

BACKGROUND

Wolfgang Armand Faust was born in the Holy Roman Empire sometime around the Third Crusade, before the reign of Frederick Barbossa. Faust was a scholar at the finest universities of the time and devoted himself to the extensive study of alchemy, astrology, and sorcery. His ultimate goal was to unlock the secrets of the universe, a goal that he pursued for the simple satisfaction of gaining knowledge for its own sake. The adept pursued this passion to the exclusion of marriage, family, wealth, or recognition, and only in passing did he ever question his choices in life. Sometime around his seventieth year, having long since exhausted all mortal sources at his disposal, Faust succeeded in calling forth a fiend from the darkest reaches of the cosmos to reveal to him the complete secrets of the world. This entity called itself Mephistopheles.

The fiend took the form of a flamboyant rake in the prime of his life. Instead of being horrified at being trapped on Gothic Earth, he was intrigued, sensing the embracing presence of the Red Death. Mephistopheles easily charmed Faust with his amusing tone, a few carefully designed illusions and "revelations," and a

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vicious sense of humor. Mephistopheles persuaded Faust that his life's quest had been in vain, and that there *was* no meaning to the universe. Ruining the years of wasted effort, Faust then made the greatest mistake of what would be a very long life. He sold his soul for, in his own words, "the chance to live many great lives."

The being calling itself Mephistopheles took an inordinate amount of interest in the mortal Faust, and proceeded to restore Faust's youth. Faust promised to never waste a moment of his life again, and used his new vitality, with Mephistopheles' help, to seduce a beautiful local village girl, Gretchen. Between Faust's new looks and his master's conjured wealth, the feat was easily accomplished. Only then did Faust begin to harbor doubts about his new pact, quickly removing himself from his innocent lover's reach to return to his studies of the universe. When his loneliness drove him to return he discovered that not only had Gretchen borne their illegitimate child, she had murdered the infant and was about to be hung for her crime. The execution soon followed, and Faust realized to his horror that this had all been part of the fiend's plan.

Sometime later Faust came into the service of the much-maligned (and with good reason) Frederick the Second. Although Faust had allowed his own sorcerous skills to grow extremely lax while he lost himself in irresistible pleasures, between his own demonstrations of magic and his dark master's covert aid Faust earned the emperor's trust. Faust led Emperor Frederick to countless bad decisions while amusing the German monarch with the conjured spirits of Prince Paris and Helen of Troy. This feat was accomplished in no small part due to Mephistopheles' aid; in truth, these spirits were no more summoned legendary figures than the Earth was flat, all a clever series of illusions and mind games orchestrated by the fiend.

It was during this time that Faust once again fell in love, if love is what one can call what he shared with the ill-fated Ingrid. Believing that Helen of Troy was destined to be his mate, Faust demanded that Mephistopheles take him back in time to become her lover. It was at this time that Faust also created what very well might be Gothic Earth's first homunculus, aptly named Homunculus. Given the nature of Faust's demonic master, and the realities of time travel on Gothic Earth, most occult scholars do not believe Faust was ever truly transported through time, merely succumbing to the trickery of his increasingly powerful master. In his mind, however, Faust gained the memories of seducing Helen of Troy and siring a child by her.

Eventually Faust returned to Frederick the Second's court and discovered the fiend's manipulations (and his own misdeeds) had caught up with him again, as they would inevitably in every life he would ever lead. The Emperor was at war with the Pope, the Empire's economy

was a shambles, and suffering had spread across the land like a flood. Though the writer Goethe would later claim that Faust won many battles (and even the war) using armies of the undead and powerful magic, this is surely more of Faust's manipulation of his own history.

Although Frederick the Second was able to temporarily lay claim to Jerusalem thanks to Faust's advice, his empire eventually fell, and the aging Faust realized the true depths of his curse.

According to legend, Faust spent the rest of his life in industrious aid, aiding others even after losing his sight, and when he finally died thus received his reward in Heaven. These legends are mostly false. Faust did indeed perform these good deeds, and could have earned his redemption, if not for the intervention of Mephistopheles. Using his pact's own words "many lives" the aged Faust was torn limb from limb by horrid, dark forces as the fiend continued to fulfill "his end of the bargain."

When Faust awoke after these terrible tortures, he found himself restored to his youthful, lustful self. He also learned that he would always be reborn in this state until he had finished what Mephistopheles deemed a suitable number as "many." The fiend then vanished in a puff of sulfurous smoke, seeking new conquests.

Since then the magician has gone through history, growing older and dying, always to be rent asunder by horrors, then reborn in his younger guise. Stripped of his chance at redemption this amazing figure even now still lives on Gothic Earth.

CURRENT SKETCH

Faust has learned to content himself with his lot in life and has fallen into somewhat of a pattern. For the majority of his younger years (twenties to late thirties) he spends his days in the pursuit of great pleasures, arts, wines, and riches (it is through this hedonistic period that countless children and adepts can trace their lineage back to the aged magician).

In his elder years, Faust spends his time in extensive studies, seeking not just to acquire wealth for his return to youth, but the exhaustive study of magic and lore in hopes of breaking his pact with Mephistopheles. It is usually in these years that the indiscretions of his youth come back to haunt him. No one can say why, but Faust's lives never amount to greatness; instead all of his works seem to go tragically wrong for him no matter what. Whether this is due to his own arrogance and vile inner corruption or some part of the dark fiend's machinations cannot be determined.

Faust has been known to take great interest in young adepts and those who show a propensity to dealing with "the Devil." (Faust's understanding of the Red Death remains locked in the medieval lore of his youth.) He has

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also tried, with very little success, to confound Mephistopheles' continuing efforts to sign new pacts with the fallen every time he encounters the fiend, which is often. However, Faust remains alternately protective and hateful of the demon which has both cursed him and granted him his power.

Faust has come to suspect that "Mephistopheles" is but one of the aliases used by the unholy order of *El Sieste*, the fiendish qabal spoken of in the writings of the Spanish mystic Pontenegro. This has led Faust to become more cautious; while Faust believes his sorcery could conceivably defeat his master in combat (a belief now doubt rooted in his own ego), he is sure that a group of devils would swiftly overpower him.

COMBAT

Wolfgang Faust has a dazzling array of magic that he can call upon when necessary. Due to an *exceptionally* long time to practice, he is a master of the rapier, saber, and other types of dueling blades, gaining a +3 bonus to his attack rolls when wielding such weapons. Faust the Elder will not usually enter combat (instead preferring to deal with opponents through conjured minions), but the Younger has been known to duel at the drop of a hat.

Faust's great intelligence provides him with a natural immunity to 1st through 3rd level illusions; when possible, he enjoys mocking the caster of such illusions by lecturing at length on the inconstancies in the images. Faust's greatest defense is also his greatest curse. As long as Mephistopheles the Liar exists and chooses not to claim Faust's soul (which he will not until Faust utterly succumbs to corruption, becoming chaotic evil) Faust is immortal. Every time he is reduced to 0 hit points or less, horrid, monstrous entities appear to tear Faust limb from limb, scattering his remains across the land. Soon thereafter (depending on how badly his body was damaged before the fiendish rending), the largest of the remains will transform into a young, twenty-something man with his vitality and health fully restored. No one has yet completely destroyed Faust's body, so no one knows what affect that would have. Faust is surprisingly good-natured about this turn of events and will usually prefer to run and never see his killers again rather than seek vengeance.

If anyone ever locates and destroys Faust's fiendish master and his phylactery (a red ruby necklace that he wore on his way into the world), Faust will immediately burst into hellish flames and rapidly crumble to dust before any onlookers' eyes. Depending on his alignment at the time, his soul may finally find release, or may be dragged into eternal damnation.

- ❖ The player characters have been contacted by a friend at a nearby university to come see him play music (or fulfill some other lifelong dream). The players will be shocked to discover that their friend's skill has increased tenfold. The friend attributes it to his new comrade, a flamboyant and lustful but genuinely likable fellow that he has recent met. Unknown to the heroes, this "comrade" is Mephistopheles, who has struck a terrible bargain with the lad. Whether the heroes will be able to win back their friend's soul is up to the Dungeon Master, but Faust may present himself as an ally towards that goal. Sensing a chance to thwart his master, Faust intends to rescue the lad from the fiend's clutches one way (helping the heroes save their friend) or the other (using sorcery to destroy the poor fellow's soul before the demon can claim it).
- ❖ A female hero or a female relative / love interest / friend of the player characters has been receiving a handsome gentleman caller (no pun intended) who has been lavishing expensive gifts upon the lass, heedless of any of her existing romantic ties. This suitor is Faust the Younger, up to his old tricks again. He fully intends to seduce the damsel (a situation which may strike close to home if the NPC is a love interest to one of the heroes). Faust's methods are honorable, at least initially, but his intentions are not nearly so pristine. If Faust is eventually rebuffed, he will not take kindly to defeat and will begin using *charm* spells, love potions or aphrodisiacs to win the object of his affections. If he grows desperate enough, Faust may even turn to his old master for aid.
- ❖ Faust the Elder has summoned the heroes to his workshop (with a homunculus snooping on them during their visit) to offer them a proposal. Faust believes he has located an ancient tome or manuscript that contains something of great value to him: the method for breaking a diabolic pact. He will no doubt disguise his motives for seeking this rite, claiming it is needed to deal with a friend or loved one, etc. The tome could be located anywhere on Gothic Earth (at the DM's choosing), and is protected by all manner of foul guardians, ranging from larvae and the undead, to traps and deadfalls. In fact, the tome's magic can break an infernal pact, but only by the most indirect method; the tome contains the true names of nearly a dozen powerful fiends. Faust plans to use this words of power to gain leverage over his master.



ADVENTURE IDEAS

PIRATA SALINAS

El Diablo del Mar

by Daniel Bandera

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BIOGRAPHY

The island of Cozumel, Mexico is a tropical paradise. However, beneath the waves of the sparkling Caribbean sea danger lurks. In the past few years, the number of sharks spotted in the surrounding waters has greatly increased. The sharks are drawn to the caves by their master, Pirata (pronounced pe-RAH-tah) Salinas, a wereshark. (See *Crossroads of Gothic Earth* for more on the island of Cozumel.)

APPEARANCE

As a hereditary wereshark, Salinas has two forms. In human-form Pirata appears as a muscular, handsome, Latino man of twenty-eight. He stands 5 foot 10 inches, and his skin, hair, and eyes are all dark brown.

Salinas' native language is Spanish, and he only knows a few words of English.

In his secondary form, Pirata is a fifteen-foot-long tiger shark. With rows of sharp jaws, thick skin, and a striped coloration on his back, his appearance is similar to most tiger sharks. However, Salinas is distinguishable by a reddish coloration on the tip of his dorsal fin. The fishermen of Cozumel recognize him by this mark. Though they do not know his true nature, they dread his many attacks on local fisherman and swimmers. Fearfully, they refer to him as "Diablo del Mar," Devil of the Sea.

BACKGROUND

In the summer of 1865, sister Maria Yvonne, a nun whose order ran a large orphanage on the island of Cuba, discovered an abandoned infant on the beach. The boy was less than a year old, so she brought him to the orphanage and looked after the baby for the first few years of his life. The sisters named him Jesus (pronounced Hesus) for they did not know his name. As the boy grew older he became the terror of the

PIRATA SALINAS

True Wereshark, Neutral Evil

Armor Class	8/3	Str	19
Movement	12, Sw 24	Dex	13
Level/Hit Dice	8	Con	14
Hit Points	49	Int	10
THAC0	13	Wis	9
Morale	15	Cha	10
No. of Attacks	1	XP	2,000
Damage/Attack	By weapon/1d10+2		
Special Attacks	Nil		
Special Defenses	+1 or silver weapon to hit		
Magic Resistance	Nil		

orphanage, bullying and beating the other children. Behind his back, the other children began to call him Pirata. When he learned this, the young bully found he liked the name and adopted it as his own.

When he was eleven, Pirata was adopted by the Salinas family. Juan and Claudia Salinas were unable to have children of their own, and Juan, who was already 52, needed someone to help him run his fishing boat. So Pirata learned to fish. He took to it amazingly well. He shocked himself and his adopted father by showing he was an expert swimmer the very first time he entered the water. He never got seasick, despite the weather, a claim his father could not make. And he quickly proved he had a knack for picking the perfect fishing spots.

At first, Pirata resented his parents, as he felt they were taking advantage of him by forcing him to work for them, but he soon came to enjoy the work, as it took him out on the water. Pirata discovered he had a strange attraction to the sea, which he could not explain. He felt a longing inside himself whenever he was on land.

Shortly after his thirteenth birthday, his parents began to notice changes in Pirata, whom they called Juanito. He was growing rapidly, and was almost as tall as his adopted father. What had started as a preference for fish became an obsession, to the point where the lad refused to eat anything else, sometimes eating the fish

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raw. Also at this time, he began to insist that his parents call him Pirata.

At about the same time Juan noticed Pirata was able to hold his breath for a very long time underwater, and an idea came to him. To cash in on his son's amazing ability, Juan coerced Pirata into becoming a coral diver. The island's coral divers gathered a large variety of coral from the ocean floor to sell to travelers and collectors. But such diving was dangerous, as the divers needed to reach depths of 60 to 80 feet. Pirata, however, proved able to reach these depths and more. He could reach the far depths and come back with black coral, much rarer and more highly prized than other types of coral. Once his son showed his potential, Juan gave up fishing entirely, and the family started living off the profits from the boy's dives.

Throughout this period, Pirata remained a lonely boy. He did not make friends with other children his age, and would spend his free time walking up and down the beach glancing out to the sea. He increasingly felt himself drawn to the ocean, but he was unsure as to why.

Two weeks after his fifteenth birthday Pirata transformed for the first time. It was late that night when the full moon rose high, and Pirata was lying on the beach staring at the sky. He felt an uncontrollable urge to go for a swim, and as soon as he entered the water his body changed. After a painful transformation, he took the form of a large tiger shark. Unconcerned with how or why, Pirata reveled in the freedom and movement of his new form, maintaining it until the moon set.

After that first time, Pirata began to learn how to control his transformation. First he could only transform on the night of the full moon. But after a year of practice, he could transform on any night.

Tragedy struck the Salinas family shortly after. One day Pirata was out diving for coral, while his father waiting in a small boat on the surface. A school of reef sharks began to circle the boy. In a panic Pirata began to hurriedly swim for the surface. His panicked motions only encouraged the sharks to attack. He had made it to within ten feet of the surface when the first shark bit into his leg. When Pirata recovered from his initial panic, he realized he had felt no pain; the bite had not even penetrated his skin. The shark began to toss its head from side to side trying to rend him to pieces. This drew the attention of the rest of the school, which moved in for their share of the kill. As panic surged through him, Pirata forced himself to change into shark form. With this first successful daylight transformation, he turned on the sharks. With a savage bite he killed the shark that had bitten into his leg. After killing the first, the blood in the water sent the rest of the sharks into a frenzy. The mass of sharks snapped viscously at anything in the water, turned the water's surface choppy.

The large disturbance just under the surface caused Juan's boat to capsize. He fell right into the frenzied school of sharks and was quickly torn to pieces. Pirata, also overcome with blood lust, joined in.

Later, when he returned to human form and realized what he had done, Pirata found that his conscience did not bother him. In fact, he felt invigorated from the kill.

Juan was just his first victim. His next was his mother. After his father's death, Pirata's mother was devastated, and Pirata quickly grew tired of her mourning and weeping. One month after his father's death, Pirata rowed out to the site with his mother in a small dingy. As his mother was leaning out to lay a wreath in the water in memorial for her husband, Pirata felt a surge of blood lust. Without a thought, Pirata pushed her in the water. Diving in after her, Pirata changed into shark-form, brutally devouring his mother.

After the deaths of his parents, Pirata left his small seaside village, and began a string of petty crimes from one end of Cuba to the other. He was always on the move over the next three years, avoiding the police that came after him. After twice chasing him across the length of Cuba, a Captain Baltazar, joined by four other officers, finally trapped Pirata in an abandoned house. Pirata thought he was doomed, but when the officers rushed the house and opened fire, the bullets did not hurt him. Pirata recovered from his shock quicker than the policemen, and wrestled a gun from them, using it to kill all five of the officers.

After that incident he fled to Mexico, now convinced of his own invulnerability. He spent the next seven years roaming Mexico. During his travels he made the acquaintance of a shady character named Burton Ruiz. Señor Ruiz was very fond of Mexican history and talked often of the sunken treasure ships off the eastern coast of Mexico. Salinas realized that his abilities could allow him to recover the sunken riches with ease. However, he was unwilling to share the riches with Ruiz. So, he murdered Burton and set off for the Mexican coast, settling on the island of Cozumel.

CURRENT SKETCH

Pirata currently lives on the island of Cozumel in a small hacienda outside of the little village of San Miguel. The hacienda, built by a wealthy American, had been abandoned after its weak foundation was discovered. Pirata bought the mansion and had it partially restored. The hacienda is on a small rise overlooking the beach, only a few hundred yards from the shore. The hacienda's courtyard boasts a freshwater spring. The spring connects with the numerous water-filled caves under the island, and in shark form Pirata uses it to travel unnoticed to the sea.

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Each day, Pirata searches the depths for sunken ships that carried the golden treasures of the new world to Spain in centuries past. So far, he has had moderate luck. He has had better progress at subduing the local shark population. Now sharks of various types dwell in the caves beneath his hacienda guarding the underwater entrance and the riches he stores there.

PERSONALITY

Pirata maintains a low profile in Cozumel. The islanders consider him a loner, as he never has any visitors and rarely comes into town seeking companionship. He realizes his temper is uncontrollable, and does not wish to bring attention to himself. Pirata loves a good brawl and will often pick fights with other large men that he meets. Towards women he is overbearing and does not take no for an answer.

Growing up in rural Cuba, Pirata lived in the shadow of the massive tobacco plantation owners. Many of these wealthy landowners took great joy in flaunting their wealth. Pirata developed a strong hatred for them early in life, yet at the same time was terribly jealous of them. As an adult, Pirata longs to be rich and join the upper class, but at the same time he can hardly disguise his hatred towards the wealthy elite.

COMBAT

In human form, Pirata fights with his fists, trying to beat his opponent into submission. In this form, Pirata will not fight to the death and will flee if outnumbered by 3 to 1, or if his opponents draw weapons. Though not proficient in firearms, he does keep a loaded army pistol in his hacienda.

In shark form, Pirata is relentless. Pirata attempts to swim beneath his opponent and attack the victim's legs. Once he has gotten hold of the victim Pirata will drag him down into the depths, before letting go. As the victim tries desperately to reach the surface, Pirata returns for another attack, and another, until the victim is no more.

Pirata often enters bloodlust during combat in shark form. This bloodlust begins three rounds after blood is first drawn. While in bloodlust, Pirata attacks with a +2 bonus to hit and damage, but his AC is reduced by 2 points. He attacks any creature near him, and can not end the bloodlust until there are no more victims in the waters. The blood spilled can be either his own or that of his victim.

While in shark form, Pirata can command sharks. He cannot summon sharks, but those already in the area will fall under his influence. The waters around Cozumel are populated with many species of sharks, including reef, blue, hammerhead, and lemon.

In all forms, Pirata is immune to weapons that are not made of silver or enchanted. Pirata has an allergy to mangrove, and avoids the mangrove swamps on the northern and southern tips of the island. Despite trying to forget his upbringing, the early years spent at the Catholic orphanage did have some affect on Pirata. He has a great fear of divine punishment, and thus will never enter a church, even if chasing a potential victim.



ROMEO GIACOMO GALLI

A Tormented Love Beyond the Grave

by Jean-F. Major
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"O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?"

—Juliet

BIOGRAPHY

When the lifeless body of a slender, brown-haired and blue-eyed young woman is found in her bed, with two small punctures on her neck, the investigators know this is the work of a vampire. But they do not know that the peaceful smile on her lips and the red rose in her hands are the work of Romeo Giacomo Galli.

APPEARANCE

Romeo is tall and slender, six feet in height and weighing around 170 lbs. He wears his raven-black hair slightly long. Behind his small glasses, his charming brown eyes never miss a detail. A small, well-kept black mustache rests under a fine nose and above delicate and romantic lips. Romeo always harbors an air of gallantry, grace and elegance. He especially prefers long, red velvet coats, white blouses and black pants. He is never without a long black cape, a red rose pinned on his coat's pocket, and a gleaming silver long sword at his hip—Juliet.

COMBAT

Romeo has all the powers, defenses and weaknesses of an Old western vampire. In addition, he is an extraordinary adept (consider him to have spellcraft: 17) and enjoys benefits from his magical sword, Juliet.

Juliet is a silver *long sword* +1. Etched onto its slender blade is the design of a rose and its thorns. Juliet's wielder gains 1 point of Charisma, due to the sword's romantic aura. But, because "love makes people mad," this is countered by a loss of 1 point of Wisdom. In any case, Juliet can never harm a human

ROMEO GIACOMO GALLI

8th-level Old Vampire Adept (Qabalist), Lawful Evil

Armor Class	1	Str	18/00
Movement	15	Dex	18
Level/Hit Dice	10+2	Con	16
Hit Points	51	Int	19
THAC0	11	Wis	14 (13)*
Morale	16	Cha	16 (17)*
No. of Attacks	By weapon		
Damage/Attack	By weapon +6		
Special Attacks	See below		
Special Defenses	Silver or +2 or better weapons to hit, regenerate 3hp/round.		
Magic Resistance	As Vampire.		
XP Value	12,000		

* **Note:** scores within parentheses represent the effects of Juliet upon its wielder.

female: Its blade will simply become too heavy to lift until its wielder stops trying to attack the woman in question.

However, the blade can be used to hurt females of other species, including human-appearing creatures such as vampyres or red widows. Every time Juliet scores a hit, the victim must save vs. spell or become blind for 1d4 hours. When this happens, Romeo will always say, "Love blinds, foolish friend." Juliet also once had a possession power, but it has faded with decades of disuse. More information about Juliet can be found below.

Though he can do no harm to females, Romeo can use his *charm gaze* against them (and they suffer the typical -3 penalty for a *charm* from an Old vampire).

Romeo casts spells as an 8th-level adept (Qabalist) (4/3/3/2). Here are the spells his spellbook contains:

1st Level: *cantrip, change self, chill touch, dancing lights, detect magic, hypnotism, read magic, sleep, wall of fog.*

2nd Level: *blindness, ESP, forget, hold person, invisibility, knock.*

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3rd Level: *clairvoyance, haste, slow, water breathing.*

4th Level: *fear, fumble.*

BACKGROUND

Lord Romeo Giacomo Galli was born in Naples, Italy, in 1579. He was a very important member of Naples' aristocracy. Even though he was well-loved and admired, he was struck by the worst of all plagues: He was bored.

In the beginning, all the false modesties and gallantries were fun, but Romeo easily tired of those games. He yearned for something artistic, something inspiring. On his twentieth birthday, he found what he needed. A distant uncle who had traveled to England sent him a unique present: a handwritten copy of the script of a play that being performed in the best theater in London, a tragedy called "Romeo and Juliet".

He devoured the entire story before he went to bed, and he fell in love with it. The desire to mount a production of this play flared to life within Romeo, and he realized he had found the cure to his boredom. He built a small theater near his castle, recruited a few locals to be his actors, and played the scenes again and again, to the admiration of his spectators. Although women did not act on the London stage, Romeo allowed them to play parts in some of his pieces. He did so for a comical, but simple, reason; his pride made him too uncomfortable with the idea of kissing a man, even if only in a play.

Trouble arose when jealousy found its way into the heart of one of the members of the cast, Leo Scanzi. Scanzi played the role of Escalus, and his wife, Madonna Scanzi, played Juliet. Leo was very jealous of Galli, and he could not understand that what happened during the play was nothing more than drama, and that Galli and Madonna had no love for each other. So, mad with jealousy, he bought a small flask of powerful poison from an apothecary and exchanged it with the fake poison used in the last scene.

When Galli played a character, he became that character. All the time Galli was playing the romantic figure of Romeo Montague, he lost all consciousness of his real life and became what he played. And when Romeo died during the play, the victim of Leo's treachery, he died as Romeo Montague.

The Red Death was amused by Galli's fatal passion, and decided to continue playing with its toy. Three nights after his death, Romeo rose as one of the undead. Leo was Romeo's first victim. The shock of the transition from life to undeath had its effect upon Romeo's personality: He remembered who he was and where he lived, but some part of him became like his favorite character. He was even more gallant than before, more charming and charismatic, and he craved one thing more than all others, more than the human blood he needed to survive—he needed Juliet's love.

From that day on, Romeo has been searching all over Europe for the most beautiful women, hoping to find his Juliet. And when he discovered those women were not his beloved, he grew sad and used them to slake his thirst.

Romeo now understands how the world works, how it rests in the hands of nameless fiends. He has built a network of spies and informants stretching around Gothic Earth. He orders them to kidnap any woman whose beauty is incomparable, or anyone with powers of divination. He holds these seers in several strongholds around the world. He wants to find Juliet through any means, conventional or mystical, no matter the cost.

PERSONALITY

Romeo is a gallant and romantic figure. He speaks with a strong Italian accent, and always mocks other men. He always seems to know everything. He is not eager to fight, though when he does, he always wields Juliet (except for ranged battles, in which case he uses his ivory-handled navy pistol) and quips while dueling, quoting phrases from Shakespeare's works (his favorite author) or commenting on the battle. He will fight one-on-one whenever possible, for example taking on the most challenging opponent while disabling the others by casting *hold person*.

JULIET

When Romeo died in Madonna Scanzi's arms, it came as a terrible shock to her. This was the first time she had seen a man die. When her husband was brutally murdered by the reborn Romeo, her mind collapsed. She grew old and lonely, rambling to herself, and in her madness, she said she wanted love more than anything. The Juliet role she had played for so long started to take control of her mind, suggesting to her that love was all that mattered. When Madonna died of the plague at a very old age, her spirit merged with Juliet's personality, refused to let go, and became anchored to the earth. She wanted her Romeo. Her one, destined, true love.

Her spirit possessed a blacksmith and forced him to forge the most beautiful blade ever made. She knew her Romeo would need someone to defend him, and she would be that someone. When the sword was ready, she possessed one person after another, commanding them to carry the sword to her Romeo. Finally, when she felt her love's strong hand close tight around her hilt and she tried to contact his mind, she failed; Romeo Giacomo Galli's mind was withdrawn, deeply buried behind sorrow, sadness and loneliness. She could not reach him.

So, she tried to possess other women, to speak to Romeo and try to bring reason to him. Every time, Romeo refused to hear the "painful lies," and his mind collapsed further as he sank his fangs deep into the

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woman's throat. Finally, Madonna Scanzi's restless spirit gave up. And so, she has become trapped within the sword, so close to her one true love, yet unable to make her presence known.

Only in death will Romeo and Juliet find each other . . . and they have both become immortal.

ADVENTURE IDEAS

- ❖ In his ravenous search for the perfect woman (for Juliet could only be perfect), Romeo could have some of his agents kidnap a female character important to the heroes, whether a contact, a friend, or a family member. Finding her should be quite a challenge, for Romeo's minions are no ordinary people.
- ❖ Romeo needs more agents to strengthen his grasp upon some small corner of Gothic Earth. He makes some eccentric townsfolk believe that they can be granted eternal life through a secret ritual only he can perform. Of course, he won't tell them they will become his vampire slaves, bereft of their mind and conscience.



ISAAC BENNINGTON

A New Breed of Hunter

by Daniel Bandera

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When a man wants to murder a tiger he calls it sport; when a tiger wants to murder him he calls it ferocity.

—George Bernard Shaw

BIOGRAPHY

Isaac Bennington was once a famous big game hunter renowned throughout Africa. He traveled the Serengeti grasslands hunting animals of all sizes. Through a twist of fate, Isaac traveled to India, where he suffered a hunting accident. He was attacked by what appeared to be a tiger, but in fact, it was a weretiger and Isaac contracted lycanthropy from it. Since the attack, Isaac has changed. No longer a charming man of the world, he has withdrawn into seclusion in the back streets of Delhi, where he now emerges only to hunt men.

APPEARANCE

A man in his mid-thirties, Isaac has brown hair that is prematurely graying. He is unshaven, and wears his hair long, just past his collar. He no longer dresses as his former wealth would indicate, but is instead dressed in the loose rags of a street beggar. His unwashed body no longer resembles the physically fit man he used to be. Isaac is just under 6 feet tall, but recently his weight has fallen to 180 lbs., from the previous 200 he had maintained for years. No one who knew the proud, boastful Isaac before he disappeared would recognize the dirty street beggar he has become.

In his tiger-man form, he walks upright, and is covered with short orange and black hair. When transformed, his hands and feet change into paws that sprout sharp nails, and a small tail grows from the base of his spine.

ISAAC BENNINGTON

5th-Level Soldier (Big Game Hunter)

Pathologic Weretiger, Neutral Evil

Armor Class	10 (3)	Str	14 (21)
Movement	12	Dex	16 (18)
Level/Hit Dice	5 (6+2)	Con	12
Hit Points	30 (42)	Int	10
THAC0	16 (15)	Wis	9
No. of Attacks	1 (3)	Cha	11
Morale	14	XP	975
Damage/Attack	By weapon/ 1d4+1/1d4+1/1d12		
Special Attacks	Nil		
Special Defenses	Hit only by silver or +1 weapons		
Magic Resistance	Nil		

BACKGROUND

Isaac was born to wealthy British colonials in Rhodesia in 1856. His father owned a mining company that extracted precious metals from newly-discovered deposits in Eastern Africa. The family estate was not near any of the colonial cities, but was situated in the rolling savanna. With no friends or siblings to play with and his father always away on business, Isaac grew up exploring the wilderness around his home. In later years he became an avid hunter, taught by the hunters from the local tribal village. Isaac would often disappear for weeks at a time on hunting expeditions. He progressed from hunting birds and gazelles to such dangerous beasts as rhino and lions.

In 1880, Isaac's father retired and handed his mining company over to him. Isaac was bored by the mining business and let his associates run the mine while he spent his time hunting. His reputation as a hunter was growing, and his business partners realized this. His partners suggested he use his growing reputation to help the mining company. Soon Isaac was traveling throughout much of sub-Saharan Africa, befriending local government officials who would grant his company generous mining rights, and make many business contacts for locating new mines. Isaac, however, used the

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business as an excuse for travel, to take advantage of the hunting in the areas he visited.

It was during these travels that he met his future wife, Margaret Eastburn. Margaret was the daughter of an aristocrat in Cape Colony. She was impressed by Isaac's tales of his own bravery during his many hunts, and he was struck by her beauty. They were wed and over the next six years, she bore their three children.

However, during this time, Isaac's reliance on his business partners proved to be a mistake, when one of the partners embezzled a large sum of money and disappeared. This left the company in financial trouble, and the scandal hurt its reputation with the local business and government communities.

In a desperate attempt to find a solution one of the partners, Gulliver Rush, contacted an associate in the prospecting business in India. Isaac traveled to Delhi and gained the mining rights to a diamond patch that the prospecting company had discovered, and his company was saved. During his time spent in India Isaac developed a fondness for the land and decided not to return to Rhodesia, but to move his family into a large mansion in the outskirts of Delhi.

With the company saved, Isaac again left its management to his partners, and eagerly returned to his passion. Through a local hunting club he learned of the tiger shoot, and was eager to participate in one. The native Indians had learned long ago that a tiger will not cross a white sheet of cloth stretched between two trees. Thus, they would create a funnel with two long sheets of white cloth with the hunters gathered at small end. The local natives riding elephants would then drive the tigers into the funnel, where the hunters could shoot the great cats at their leisure.

Isaac relished the sense of power he derived from killing such a large beast, and participated in many such hunts, until one ill-fated trip. During his last hunt, the excursion had been hampered by rain. Isaac remained behind with some of the porters while the rest of the hunters retired without having spotted a tiger. The rain continued until nightfall, clearing shortly after. The porters spotted a tiger and chased it into the funnel. His frustration forgotten in his building excitement Isaac raised his rifle and fired. He could not believe that he missed, but the tiger was still standing. Stranger still it charged straight at him, leaping over the white sheet stretched in front of him. The tiger mauled him badly, but luckily porters were on hand to drive the creature away. Badly wounded, Isaac returned home to recuperate, unaware that the tiger was in fact a weretiger and Isaac had been infected with the Dread Disease.

By the next full moon Isaac had recovered from his wounds. Over the next three nights, the household was terrorized by a ferocious tiger that attacked and killed three members of Isaac's hunting staff. None of the

precautions that Isaac took to safeguard the house worked, and the tiger escaped. During the nights of these attacks Isaac would experience a blackout and be unable to remember the night's events.

After the third night the killings inexplicably stopped. A few of the servants left in fear, but Isaac was able to convince most of them to stay. Peace returned to the household for a time, that is until the next full moon.

On the first night of the next full moon fear returned to the household when Isaac's oldest son, William, was killed in his room by the tiger. Isaac mourned the loss of his son, but felt a cold spot in his heart at the knowledge that the tiger had returned. That night he patrolled the mansion grounds with a rifle, but as before with the moon rise he blacked out. Transforming into a tiger he crept into the house, and found his wife in the hall outside their bedroom. He attacked her, but her screams brought everyone in the house running, and he was forced to flee. Margaret was horribly wounded, but she survived the attack. The next morning Isaac was furious when he learned of the attack. He swore he would kill this beast no matter where it went. That night he ordered a half dozen of his servants to patrol the grounds with him. The next morning one of those servants was found horribly ravaged by the tiger.

The next morning the servants fled the house, and Isaac was forced to look after his wife by himself. Again, after three nights the attacks stopped. Isaac contacted his old business partner, Gulliver Rush, informing him of the events that had taken place. Mr. Rush helped Isaac to nurse his wife slowly back to health.

One month later, on the first night of the full moon, Isaac transformed again into the tiger. Attacking by surprise in the dark of the night, he killed Mr. Rush while he sat enjoying a cigar, and left his remains spread about the back porch. The next morning, Isaac was furious at the tiger's return, but a renewed sense of hopelessness descended upon him in the face of its return. Over the next two nights, Isaac's hopelessness grew to utter despair as he unknowingly killed his newly recovered wife and his only daughter while in tiger-form.

However, his last attack did not go unnoticed. The only other person left in the house that last night was Isaac's youngest son, Gilbert. Gilbert saw the attack and followed the tiger, discovering who had killed his sister. The next morning, after returning to normal and discovering the death of his daughter, Isaac was vainly trying to control his overwhelming grief. Distracted he did not notice as Gilbert tried to shoot him with his own shotgun. The gun was much too large for the boy to wield and he was knocked over by the force of the blast. In an instant Isaac sprang on his son, grabbing the boy and shaking him, demanding to know why the boy did that. Through tears and vile curses the boy told his father what he learned, of his father's true nature. Isaac did not

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believe the boy until he glanced down to notice the wound from the shotgun blast, which he had not even felt, healing rapidly before his eyes.

The shock of the awful true was too much for Isaac, and his mind snapped. He rushing into the jungle, fleeing the horror that he had caused. That was the last that most people have seen of Isaac Bennington.

CURRENT SKETCH

Isaac has left behind his former life, unable to bear the memories of the pain and suffering he caused. Now he lives penniless on the streets of Delhi, filled with self-pity and self-hatred. Like most of the city's poor, he has no home but the back streets and alleyways. With no money, he is forced to beg or steal to feed and clothe himself. At first he felt great shame in this, but now he sees it as his only means of survival. Isaac fears his past and tries to bury the memories of what happened to his family, often using alcohol to keep these memories buried deep.

For the three nights of the full moon each month, Isaac becomes the tiger. He fears these nights more than anything, because he knows that night will mean horror and death for someone. Unusually, during the nights when the tiger hunts, he stalks other street people living in same part of town. Occasionally, in this form the tiger remembers Isaac's former love of hunting and seeks out some of his old associates from the hunting clubs to attack.

After Isaac disappeared, the city officials pronounced him dead and transferred his possession of his estate to Gilbert. Gilbert, Isaac's remaining son, refused to speak about what happened to his family or his father. In fact, he has not spoken a word since that day. With no one to look after the him, the boy was taken in by the Brothers of the Sacred Heart. This group of Catholic monks considers its holy mission to educate young men and operates schools for young boys across the world. The order in Delhi has taken in young Gilbert, allowing him to live at the school, in the hopes that he will eventually open up to them and be able to put the horrible circumstances of his family's death behind him.

PERSONALITY

During his previous life Isaac was considered a gruff, quiet person that many people found hard to approach. Overwhelmed by his personal tragedy, he is even more unsociable now. Often drunk, this shattered man is constantly depressed, tortured by the guilt he feels for the death of his family. Anything that reminds him of his family or his former life, is likely to cause him to burst in

tears. Unaware that there is any cure for his condition, Isaac see himself as doomed for the rest of his life. If he could end his life, he would, but he has found that his infliction protects him from most harm.

COMBAT

During the three nights of the full moon, Isaac is forced to take man-tiger form. This painful process takes him a full turn. When he attacks in this form, he attempts to stalk his victims to gain surprise before pouncing. In each round of combat, Isaac can rake with his front claws, causing 2-5 points of damage with each hit, and attack with his powerful bite for 1-12 points of damage.

There are a few tigers that prowl the lands around Delhi. Isaac cannot control these tigers, but he does feel a special bond with them when in man-tiger form. Often, while in tiger form, he will spend time with them. Occasionally he will hunt with one of the tigers, but this is rare, and never more than two tigers participate in the hunt together.



PROFESSOR DORA MELTZER

A Gifted NPC for Gothic New York

by Joe Bardales
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PROFESSOR DORA MELTZER

9th-Level Mystic (Medium), Neutral Good

Armor Class	10	Str	6
Movement	12	Dex	8
Level/Hit Dice	9	Con	9
Hit Points	20	Int	13
THACO	17	Wis	17
No. of Attacks	1	Cha	16
Damage/Attacks	By weapon		
Special Attacks	Nil		
Special Defenses	Nil		
Magic Resistance	Nil		

Weapon Proficiencies: Knife, club, derringer pistol

Nonweapon Proficiencies: Ancient language (Hebrew), forbidden lore, modern language (Russian), modern language (Yiddish), prognostication (palm reading, Tarot card reading), sixth sense, spiritcraft

Mystic Spell Spheres

Major Access: Divination, Protection, Healing, Thought

Minor Access: All (at 10th level, Dora Meltzer will gain minor access to the sphere of Wards)

APPEARANCE

While Professor Dora Meltzer is still a relatively young woman, she appears to be much older than she actually is due to her connection with the mystical world. Her most distinguishing feature is her dark eyes, which still maintain a youthful appearance despite the fact they appear to be staring past the onlooker and deep into somewhere else. Dora Meltzer dresses in the simple clothes typical to immigrant women of the period, but she sometimes adapts the

affectations of a gypsy woman when reading palms in her parlor.

BACKGROUND

Professor Dora Meltzer was born Rebekah “Bessie” Abreveya in a small rural village in Russia. As a little girl, it quickly became apparent to her family and neighbors that she was psychically gifted. This wasn’t very surprising, as both her mother and grandmother possessed the same paranormal abilities, and there was evidence that their psychic talents had been passed down through many generations on her maternal side. Under the tutelage of both her mother and maternal grandmother, Bessie soon learned to master what they called simply the Gift.

While most of the villagers respected the women of the Abreveya family and consulted them in matters both major and mundane, a jealous few accused them of dealing with evil spirits and practicing witchcraft like the Daughters of Moab from Jewish legend. Still, life was good if not simple for Bessie and her family, and at 16 the local matchmaker betrothed her to Hymen Meltzer, a young tailor from a neighboring village. The two were wed a year later in a simple ceremony, and they happily settled into a tiny cottage near the home of her parents.

The young couple soon became a young family, and within five years they were blessed with four children, two boys and two girls. Bessie’s sons, Samuel and Bernie, were strong and handsome, taking after their father, while her daughters, Ray and Lillian, favored their mother and soon started to show the same psychic talents of the Gift that she possessed. While they weren’t wealthy they did not know poverty, and they held a role of prominence in their community. And just as life seemed to be perfect for the Meltzer couple, the pogrom came.

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On a crisp February morning in 1885, a gang of Cossacks entered the small village on horseback and began to burn the community the Meltzers' called home to the ground. Many of the villagers were slaughtered that day, and Bessie lost her parents and grandmother to the flames of hatred. In the aftermath of the onslaught, the Meltzers decided like so many other Russian Jews of the day that it was time to emigrate from Russia to start a new life free of religious intolerance in the United States.

In the summer of 1885, the Meltzer family arrived in New York City and settled on the Lower East Side in a tenement building located on 97 Orchard Street. Hymen Metzger was able to find work in New York as a tailor quite readily, and Bessie began to practice as a medium by setting up a fortune telling parlor in the front room of their apartment to supplement their income. Adopting the professional name "Professor Dora Meltzer," Bessie soon rose to prominence in the Lower East Side immigrant community because of the accuracy of her palm readings. As both a medium and healer, this status was on par with that of the rabbis and other professionals in the area.

PERSONALITY

Due to years of contact with the spirit world, Dora Meltzer appears to be aloof and at times worlds away. Most of the time, Dora is soft spoken and reliant on her daughters to stay in the present and manage her daily affairs. Her personality changes, however, when she is giving a reading, and she can be quite forceful and direct

when relating the information she has divined from the spirit world with a client. When using her psychic gifts for extended periods, the physical strain of maintaining focus that she endures becomes readily apparent. For this reason, most initial contact with Professor Meltzer by those seeking her services is through her daughters.

COMBAT

If at all possible, Dora Meltzer prefers to avoid physical confrontation. If she is physically threatened, she relies on the protection provided by her husband and two sons. As befits a typical immigrant housewife, her weapon proficiencies were for years limited to simple weapons like the knife and club. She has recently purchased a derringer pistol, feeling the need to better protect herself and her family. After all, the Lower East Side is one of the toughest and most dangerous neighborhoods in Manhattan.

Forbidden Lore

Dora Meltzer's superior abilities as a medium have attracted the attention of many. Teddy Roosevelt, the president of New York City's Board of Police Commissioners has secretly called upon her services in solving some rather bizarre criminal cases with a supernatural element. Other famous clients who have consulted her include American novelist Samuel Clemens and the grand dame of aristocratic life in New York, Mrs. Astor.

Professor Meltzer also possesses a substantial reference library on the occult, and she allows certain individuals whose trust she has gained to utilize this valuable resource. Many of the works in her library have been passed down through her family for generations, and predominately pertain to ancient Jewish magic and the Kabbala. Unfortunately, this library only represents a small portion of her family inheritance, as many more valuable tomes were destroyed in the fires of the pogrom that destroyed her mother's home. It is rumored, however, that the instructions for constructing a clay golem are contained in one of these ancient books.

Dora Meltzer is also aware that some evil minion of the Red Death hid behind the racial and religious intolerance of the Russian pogroms that drove her from her village. While the pogroms were indeed evil in their own right for their hatred and bigotry, this unknown entity in legion with the Great Evil seized this opportunity to rid itself of the threat that individuals with powers similar to the women of Professor Meltzer's family presented to its diabolical designs. While she is unaware of who or what this servant of darkness may be,

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she is convinced that it has followed her to the New World and is biding its time until the opportunity to strike presents itself again.

REFERENCES

Professor Dora Meltzer as presented here is a fictionalized account of the real Dora “Bessie” Meltzer. Very little is known about the real Professor Dora Meltzer, and continued research into the background of this fascinating individual from America’s immigrant past is still being conducted by the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, located at 97 Orchard Street in New York City. At the time of this writing, the Tenement Museum is still searching for descendants of the Meltzer family who might be able to shed some light on Dora’s history. If you have any information about Professor Dora Meltzer, or believe you may be related to her, please contact the Lower East Side Tenement Museum.

The inspiration for this article came from a business card dating to the 1890s and found in the floorboards of the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in 1993. A photograph of this card accompanies this article. The reverse side is in Yiddish.

For more on New York City in an 1890s *Masque of the Red Death* campaign, see my article “Gothic New York” in the Kargatane Netbook *Crossroads of the Gothic Earth*.

- ❖ “Seeking a Reading on an Immigrant Past” by Robin Pogrebin, *The New York Times*, Wednesday, June 30, 1999.
- ❖ *Mysteries and Secrets of Magic* by C. J. S. Thompson, originally published 1927 by John Lane, London.
- ❖ For more on life at 97 Orchard Street, visit the Lower East Side Tenement Museum Website at <http://www.wnet.org/archive/tenement/>



THE SONS OF LIBERTY

For God and Country

by Andrew Wyatt
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"Some men must rule; the great mass of men must be ruled. Some men must own; the great mass of men must work for those who own."

—Mark Hanna

THE SONS OF LIBERTY

A Lawful Evil Qabal

The Sons of Liberty have recently become quite an active qabal, but their history extends back to the American Revolution and even to the Defiance itself. The Sons consider themselves the spiritual descendants of the American Founding Fathers. Comprised of a handful of wealthy industrialists, lawyers and politicians, the Sons believe they have obtained their financial and political might through Divine will. They thus believe that any course of action they follow to further their own financial interests carries God's blessing, and consider the attempts of social reformers to break the status quo tantamount to blasphemy. Fortunately, as "His favorite sons" the Sons of Liberty feel it is their moral duty to guide the United States towards its destiny as the greatest nation in the history of the world. Chiefly, this means guarding the nation's economic interests at home and abroad. The Sons reason that since they ensure the nation's prosperity and guide its development, their concerns and those of the nation are one and the same.

The Sons are even more potentially dangerous than their status as an elitist "old boy's club" would imply due to their keen interest in the supernatural and its potential power. The Sons view the forces of the supernatural as merely another resource, like coal or steel. As with those resources, the Sons seek to control the supernatural as the key to advancing the United States' interests, and to protect it from enemies within and without. The Sons' views on magic and the paranormal on Gothic Earth are

somewhat exaggerated, as they believe that the world is literally swarming with unseen, occult forces; the Sons hold that if *they* do not monopolize this power, someone else *will*. Their solution to this perceived threat is simple and decidedly American: fight fire with fire. To this end, the Sons send their agents across the globe in search of forbidden lore. Their hope is to uncover ways in which the supernatural can be exploited for their purposes.

Like most of the known qabals, the Sons of Liberty are aware of the Red Death's existence. However, they are largely ignorant of its corrupting influence. Because the Red Death's taint is an intrinsic quality of the supernatural on Gothic Earth, the Sons believe that the Red Death is the primal force responsible for supernatural manifestations. They do not associate it with evil, speaking of it in the same terms they would use to describe an electrical generator. Thus, the Sons unwisely court the Red Death's attention, all the while believing that they are simply exploiting a supernatural phenomenon for their own purposes.

SYMBOL

Unlike many qabals, the Sons have a disparate membership rather than formal cells. All of the actual members, who number sixty-four in 1890, know one another by reputation, if not by sight. Though they are scattered across the cities of the United States, many of the Sons attended the same schools and belong to the same social clubs. However, in order to prevent impersonation and to facilitate dealings with minions, the Sons have adopted a symbol: a quill surrounded by thirteen stars. This is typically emblazoned on a silver disc about the size of a coin, and kept on the person for presentation in case identity or authority needs to be established.

MEMBERS

Traditionally, the qabals of Gothic Earth have organized themselves into a hierarchical structure of isolated cells. The Sons of Liberty, however, have highly focused

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temporal goals that render such multiple layers of secrecy impractical. Furthermore, they have a small, tightly controlled membership roster. A single group, assembling only rarely but maintaining regular communication, serves their purposes better.

All of the Sons of Liberty are wealthy white men, although not all were born into privilege. Many are self-made men who built a fortune through guile and genius, and even those members who come from wealthy families hold up the Puritan work ethic as an ideal. For all their sinister activities, the Sons see themselves as highly moral men, even as the vanguard of Christian America. The Sons believe that their position of privilege is Divinely ordained, and that those who oppose them are working not just against the qabal and the United States itself, but the very will of God. This also explains (or justifies) their contempt for socialists and anyone who crusades against the wealthy.

The Sons count among their number some of the most prominent names in modern America. The great majority of the Sons are lawyers or businessmen, and many are also politicians. Throughout the nineteenth century, a career in law was the natural precursor to a career in politics, and many of the Sons fit the model of the American lawyer-statesman. The latter part of the century has increasingly seen a rise in industrialists and other businessmen turning to politics to protect their financial interests. Not only do such men have the capital to carry out a political campaign, but also it is not generally seen as a conflict of interest for an oil tycoon to serve as a senator that writes oil tariff laws, for example.

HISTORY

Though they might seem to have no connection to the Defiance, the Sons of Liberty actually do have some distant ties to that ancient society. Quite ironically, while the Sons are blind to the Red Death's true danger, their earliest predecessors were originally tireless enemies of the Red Death and its minions.

The Sons' legacy begins with the destruction of the Library at Alexandria, and the subsequent diaspora of the qabals. One of the qabals seeded by a Defiance survivor took root in the heart of central Europe among the rugged Teutonic tribes. The same people who had finally brought low the Roman Empire, these pagan barbarians were gradually becoming feudal Christians. The fledgling qabal that emerged as the Dark Ages settled over Europe was known as the Golden Host. Its membership was made up entirely of intelligent and God-fearing nobles who had pledged themselves to the destruction of the Red Death at any cost. Unfortunately, the secrets of magic that the Defiance had labored so hard to preserve were not passed on to the Host. No adepts or mystics were counted among its members, and to the

Golden Host magic was a tantalizing secret lost to the mists of time.

While the Stone flourished in the British Isles, the Host struggled to succeed without true magic. Increasingly, the pursuit of occult power began to take precedent over opposing the true enemy. Many in the qabal devoted themselves utterly to the secrets of the ancients, or at least the medieval interpretation of those secrets: alchemy, sacred geometry, numerology, and other supposed "enlightened" magical practices. The Host became preoccupied with understanding the supernatural and manipulating it to expand their influence, ostensibly for the purposes of combating the Red Death. As the centuries passed, however, the truth about the Red Death's unspeakable evil faded from the Golden Host completely. By the time of the Holy Roman Empire, the Host had been reduced to an extremely secretive cadre of Frankish nobles, more interested in debating the writings of the Hermetic Books than any battle against a cosmic evil.

Though this state of affairs persisted for many centuries, an important change came with the Renaissance. By this time, the Golden Host had spread to nearly all of Western Europe, and though its members were few, there was hardly a court from Denmark to Italy that did not include at least one member. Historically, the Host had limited its membership to European nobles, but the rise of a merchant class beginning in the fifteenth century began to shift the qabal's demographics. Increasingly, new members were merchants and financiers, men who were not landed gentry but fabulously wealthy nonetheless. Knowledge of the supernatural—which by this time was the Golden Host's only legacy—was seen as a valuable tool by this new "middle class." For the first time in centuries, the qabal began to take a more assertive stance. Members were interested in reigning in supernatural forces and using them to protect and advance their financial interests. Gradually, a modern, well-defined philosophy began to emerge at the heart of the Host, best articulated as "mercantile power backed by supernatural power." Long before Adam Smith was even born, the Host dreamed of a world of free enterprise, a world that they saw as ordained by God. They saw governments as obtrusive entities that prevented the men truly destined to rule from achieving their goals.

Unfortunately, before the eighteenth century dawned, the Golden Host began to dissolve. Fragmented among European empires that had grown increasingly competitive and antagonistic, the Host was no longer capable of perpetuating any kind of central authority for the qabal. Cell leaders began to refuse to speak with other leaders, and what little unity the qabal had disintegrated almost overnight in the late seventeenth century. Still, though the local cells eventually crumbled,

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the Host's secrets lived on among isolated members of the educated middle class. The tenets of the Enlightenment were often in line with the Host's beliefs, and the secrets of the hidden world were passed on among a small cadre of trustworthy men.

In the latter half of the eighteenth century, the lingering legacy of the Golden Host was fermenting in the minds of a handful of newly independent British colonists. The occult secrets of the Host, though a far cry from the Puritan background of America, were woven subtly through the colonies, mixed in with revolutionary ideas about government and commerce. Underneath the genteel Christian facade of the Founding Fathers, underneath even their pseudo-mystical "secret societies" such as the Masons, the Golden Host was preparing to rise again.

In October of 1787, shortly after the final draft of the United States Constitution was completed, a small group of Convention delegates gathered together in secret to draft another document. The men who were party to this clandestine effort all possessed fragmentary knowledge of the supernatural, the last guttering legacy of the Golden Host. Determined to protect the newly reorganized republic from the minions of the Red Death, the delegates swore to present a unified front in the face of the supernatural.

The brief declaration that they quickly drafted and signed, known as the Oath of Philadelphia, affirmed three vital points. First, the United States of America should be nothing less than the most powerful nation in the history of the world. Second, the signers, as the architects of that nation, were obligated to protect it at all costs. Third, supernatural forces should be either turned to the nation's interests or utterly destroyed. The delegates that signed the Oath christened their new qabal the Sons of Liberty. Not even the modern Sons claim to have seen the original document, so the signers are unknown. Nonetheless, speculation regarding their identity is a persistent topic of conversation for the historically inclined Sons.

Little is known about the qabal's fate between its founding and the years of the Civil War. All evidence seems to suggest that while the ideals of the Sons were noble, limitations on communication and travel hindered the qabal's activities. Perhaps the founding members were simply too unassertive, or too bogged down in national growing pains and foreign conflicts to truly guide the development of the nation. By the 1860s, the qabal's activities were negligible, and its membership extraordinarily slim.

The qabal's fortunes and core philosophy began to shift when a prominent railroad baron (whose identity the Sons guard closely) became a member immediately following the Civil War. This captain of industry revitalized the qabal by aggressively pursuing any occult rumors that surfaced. The qabal began to enlist agents

across the world to investigate such rumors, and new members were drawn from the most prominent figures of business and law. The Sons' grip on significant American economic and political power tightened considerably.

In the space of just thirty years, the character of the qabal has changed radically. Still patriotic and protectionist, the Sons have nonetheless become more ruthless and arrogant. Its members are cautious, but not skeptical, and doggedly pursue the slightest hint of supernatural creatures, artifacts, or any lore that they could possibly utilize for their ends. Those few qabals that even know of the Sons' existence speculate wildly about which American giants might be counted among its members; names like Carnegie, Morgan, and Rockefeller are whispered. No hard evidence has yet linked any particular individual to the Sons, however.

In a time of crisis, the Sons can gather together just about anywhere to discuss matters that affect the qabal as a whole. For the Sons' annual meeting, termed the Convention, the preferred place of assembly is in Philadelphia, in homage to the Founding Fathers. As American industry has begun to shift towards the Midwest, however, some among the Sons have advocated moving Conventions to Chicago.



THE BIG GAME HUNTER

A New Kit For Sporting Heroes

by Daniel Bandera

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BIG GAME HUNTER

Class:	Soldier
Ability Reqs:	Dexterity 12 Constitution 10 Wisdom 10
Prime Req:	Dexterity
Hit Die:	d10
Attack as:	Soldier
Save as:	Soldier
Advance as:	Soldier
Exc Strength?	No
Spell Ability?	No
Exc Constitution?	Yes
Starting Cash:	6d6

Proficiencies

Weapon Slots:	4
Additional Slot:	3
Nonproficiency Penalty:	-2
Nonweapon Slots:	3
Additional Slot:	3
Available Categories:	General, Wilderness
Bonus Proficiency:	Hunting
Recommended Proficiencies:	Survival; Navigation; Marksmanship; Quick Draw; Move Silently; Hide in Shadows; Language, Modern (local dialects); Tracking

DESCRIPTION

Big game hunters are more than hunting enthusiasts. For them, hunting is a passion. Big game hunters come from a variety of backgrounds. Some are part of the rich colonial aristocracy who first experience hunting in large safari groups. Despite the circus-type nature of these safaris, some of them become intrigued, and seek out a skilled hunter to learn more. Others are the bored sons of laborers who seek escape from the same path in life of their fathers. Still others are retired military men who enjoy this less dangerous pastime of hunting over war.

Though most are of European decent, big game hunters typically come from a European colony in Africa or South America, as opposed to Europe itself. As the hunter develops a passion for the hunt, he begins to travel all over the world looking for new places in which to hunt or new bigger animals to test his mettle. As their skill grows, so does their renown, and they may become popular folk-heroes in these areas. However, in their quest for new experiences, these hunters often end up violating taboos held by the local natives, or releasing imprisoned evils from long ago.

Examples of big game hunters include “Bloodypaws” Lord Louis Randeem (*The Book of Sorrows*), Isaac Bennington, and Buffalo Bill Cody.

ROLE~PLAYING

A variety of people become big game hunters. Some are the quiet loners who enjoy hunting as it takes them away from the bustling cities and back to nature. Others are proud people who enjoy the praise and admiration of those around them. In either case, big game hunters are extremely confident in their own skills and are constantly seeking new challenges to test themselves against.

SPECIAL BENEFITS

The big game hunter often develops a reputation in the upper class of colonial countries. As his fame spreads, he is invited into social circles where he can meet influential members of the colonial community. This fame, and the associated social contacts, rarely extends outside the hunter’s local area. The big game hunter can use his contacts to perform a minor legal or governmental favor for him once per month. If the hunter attempts to take advantage of his contacts more often, their opinion of him may change.

As hunting becomes his passion, the big game hunter’s skill increases. Once he reaches 5th level, he has mastered how to successfully stalk his prey, gaining a permanent +1 bonus to his hunting proficiency. In addition, with a successful use of his hunting proficiency,

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the Big Game Hunter gains an additional +1 bonus to hit and damage on his first shot in combat. This bonus is in addition to the normal bonus gained for attacking by surprise. These bonuses only apply in the big game hunter's local hunting grounds. Once he reaches 7th level, the hunter's skill has increased so that these bonuses can be used in any terrain of a similar type. At 9th level, the Hunter has mastered the skill of hunting in all terrain, and gains these bonuses in any wilderness surroundings.

For example, if the big game hunter, Gregory Pierce, learned to hunt in the jungles of the Congo River Basin, at 5th level he would gain the above bonus only when in that area. Once Pierce reached 7th level, he could gain the bonus while hunting in the jungles of India or South America. Only on reaching 9th level would he gain the bonus when hunting on the grasslands of Southern Africa or the prairies of the American Mid-West.

SPECIAL HINDRANCES

Big game hunters are very traditional. As such, they use the traditional hunting rifle, a single shot breech-loaded rifle. Often customized by each hunter, the weapon shows off the hunter's skill, as well as giving the animals he stalks a "sporting chance." A big game hunter must spend an initial weapon proficiency on the breech-loaded rifle, and any weapon-related non-weapon proficiencies (e.g. marksmanship) must be taken with the same rifle.

Because the Big Game Hunter comes from an upper class background, they do not face the physical exertion faced by others of the soldier class and are prohibited from rolling for exceptional strength.



THE CHIMNEY SWEEP

A Tradesman Kit For Masque of the Red Death

by Kurt A. Johnson
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Up where the smoke is all billa'ed and
curled
'Tween pavement and stars is the
chimney sweep's world
Where there's 'ardly no day, nor 'ardly
no night
T here's things 'af in shadow and 'afway
in light

—*Mary Poppins*

CHIMNEY SWEEP

Class:	Tradesman
Ability Reqs:	Dexterity 14
Prime Req:	Dexterity
Hit Dice:	d6
Attack as:	Tradesman
Save as:	Tradesman
Advance as:	Tradesman
Exc Strength?	No
Spell Ability?	No
Exc Constitution?	No
Starting Cash:	See Special Notes
Proficiencies	
Weapon Slots:	3
Additional Slot:	4
Nonproficiency Penalty:	-3
Nonweapon Slots:	6
Additional Slots:	3
Available Categories:	General, Rogue
Bonus Proficiency:	Climb Walls
Recommended Proficiencies:	Detect Noise, Find/Remove Traps, Hide in Shadows, Move Silently, Open Locks, Tightrope Walking, Tumbling, plus Rope Use (which may be purchased with no penalty)

DESCRIPTION

Chimney sweeps are often overlooked as simple laborers: always present, but merely utilitarian in nature. However, living their lives on the rooftops of their cities gives them a unique perspective on the society around them. Entering people's houses and watching the goings-on through windows generally gives sweeps a broad understanding of their society, and the people in it.

This same watchfulness, however, has also alerted them to various inexplicable occurrences. Observing shadows that move on their own, or gargoyles that shift from place to place, has given them an understanding of occult goings-on. Many have organized brotherhoods, where they pool their information on these events, and attempt to work against these strange beings.

Their lack of education and social status has generally isolated them from the qabals of gentlemen and professors (see Special Hindrances). But, some more informed qabals have forged links with the sweeps, and use them to gather information.

Chimney sweeps often dress in shabby black clothes, their faces and hands darkened with soot and ash. Many of them began in the trade as small children, being lowered down chimneys at the end of a rope. All are from the poorest classes of their society, and tend to be poorly educated, if at all.

ROLE~PLAYING

Chimney sweeps commonly know a great deal more than they are willing to betray. They are often intelligent, but speak in a heavy, colloquial accent.

The sweep's humble origin means that gentlemen and upper-class characters will be unwilling to associate with him or her. Also, any establishment, such as a gentlemen's club or a restaurant will not allow the sweep in, except to clean the establishment's chimney. However, strangely enough, sweeps are considered lucky. People will often go out of their way to shake hands with

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a sweep, hoping that a little bit of the sweep's luck will rub off on them.

Chimney sweeps may be of any alignment, but tend toward non-Lawful alignments.

SPECIAL BENEFITS

Due to a sweep's special luck and experience, once per day he or she may add a +1 bonus to any Dexterity check.

SPECIAL HINDRANCES

Initially, a sweep is assumed to be illiterate. As such, a character may not buy the Read/Write nonweapon proficiency during character creation. Once the sweep has advanced far enough to acquire more slots (tradesmen gain one additional nonweapon proficiency slots at every third level) he or she may then purchase that proficiency.

Further, a sweep's lower class affiliation means that, when he tries to communicate with anyone from the upper classes, he receives a -4 reaction penalty.

Note: This second hindrance can make the sweep difficult to role-play in a *Masque of the Red Death* campaign. Sweeps will generally receive precious little support from the local constabulary, will be unwelcome in genteel homes, and will generally draw a great deal of negative attention at upper-class social functions. Conversely, unlike many upper-class characters, a sweep will be able to remain in lower-class taverns, waterfronts, etc., without drawing any unwanted attention. As such, if the campaign revolves around middle- or upper-class characters, the Dungeon Master should reserve this kit to nonplayer characters.

STARTING MONEY & EQUIPMENT

A chimney sweep will begin with one suit of shabby clothes, a collection of brooms and brushes (generally worth \$1.75), and a further \$1.00 which may be spent on other items.

determined to kill the King. During a royal procession, a large dog or werewolf charged the King's horse, which reared, nearly throwing the King. But, at a critical moment, a man, dressed in rags and covered in soot, stepped forward and caught the horse's halter. He quietly calmed the animal, and then melted back into the crowd. The King demanded to know the name of his shabby benefactor, but his questions were merely answered with, "He's only a chimney sweep!"

☠

In England, in the days of the reign of King George, the Red Death

OCTOBER 31ST, 1926.

DETROIT.



A motorcar pulled up to the curb in front of Mercy Hospital. It was one of the new Tudor Sedan models, looking as though it had just rolled off the Ford factory floor. Indeed, such may have been the case.

A man stepped out from the back seat. He was all earth tones: his face and hands dark and leathery, his long coat a luxurious tan cashmere. His eyes were concealed behind small, darkly tinted glasses. The brightest splash of color on his person was the reddish-brown fez he wore upon his bald head.

The man showed the withered frailty of advanced age, but his shoulders were not stooped by the years. Reaching back into the automobile, he pulled out a large, cylindrical object draped in black cloth. It dangled from his hand via a loop set in its top. From the way the black object danced in the gusting winds, it was obvious that its bulk was not matched by its weight.

The man gazed up at the approaching storm clouds for a moment, then turned to briefly admire the hospital's architecture. Then he walked inside. His driver left the motor running.

There was more activity within the building than the aged visitor would have liked. His taut lips frowned as he wandered the halls of the hospital. All the doors looked the same to him. Rounding a corner, his gaze fell upon a desk further down the hall, where several nurses were talking. Standing very still, the visitor whispered words in a crackling voice.

"Ām-āsgetti.

"Ām-baiu.

"Ām-heh.

"Ākhanet maati em khemu."

Having intoned the old words, the visitor strode forward. None of the nurses took note of his approach. None of them objected as he reached over the desk to examine their papers. None of them paused in their conversation as the visitor's elements-hardened finger slid down a list of names, stopping when it came to "Houdini, Harry." None of them interrupted the visitor as he repeated the room number to himself and walked off again.

Only after the visitor had left did one of the nurses pause, wrinkling her nose. "Do either of you smell that?" she asked the others.

The other two nurses sniffed the air. "Yeah . . . cinnamon. That's funny." The nurses shrugged and returned to their conversation.

Meanwhile, the visitor found the room of Harry Houdini. The door was open. As he stepped into the doorway, the master magician lay cocooned in his deathbed, a burlier man sitting in a wooden chair at his side. The seated man was reading from a collection of papers.

"The magical fraternity is with you in your fight for health. You are the greatest of them all."

The visitor grinned, deeply wrinkling his sunken cheeks. "What an amusing claim," he said despite himself, his accented English speaking of exotic ports.

The dying man turned his head to meet the visitor's gaze. "Pardon me?" he grunted, his voice betraying a bruised ego. The seated man continued to babble on about his papers, oblivious.

"Forgive me if I have offended you, Great Houdini," offered the visitor in humble supplication as he moved into the room. "I am a great admirer of your performances. I think now of the posters for your latest tour." As the visitor walked to stand at the foot of Houdini's bed, he stretched out his free hand to frame the poster in his mind.

"Buried Alive! Egyptian Fakirs Outdone! Master Mystifier HOUDINI! The Greatest Necromancer of the Age—Perhaps of All Times!"

The visitor grinned slightly, showing off yellowed teeth. "These posters, they are quite . . . boastful."

The dying magician snorted. "I don't have to listen to this," he growled. Houdini turned to the seated man. "Hardeen, summon an orderly."

The seated man looked startled. "What's wrong? Why do you need an orderly?"

Houdini turned back to glare at his aged visitor. "To escort *you* out, sir."

Hardeen started to babble like an offended child. The visitor merely listened in quiet amusement, taking the opportunity to rest his cloth-draped package on Houdini's

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bed, next to his feet. Hardeen's prattling soon broke the dying magician's attention, and he turned to chide his brother.

"What?" asked Houdini, equally annoyed and confused by his brother's refusal to acknowledge the presence of the newcomer. "Don't be difficult. Go get an orderly," he ordered again, his voice pained.

Hardeen, defeated, mumbled to himself and shuffled towards the door. The visitor watched him take the first few steps, then turned back to Houdini to chide him.

"Your treatment of me has been most rude, Great Houdini. You treat me as a strange beggar, when we have already met. Do you not know me?"

A dim flicker of recognition struggled behind Houdini's gaze. "Wait a moment," he mumbled, pausing to think. "Yes," he continued, his voice uncertain. "I have seen you before, haven't I? Was it in Montreal?"

The annoying second man reappeared at Houdini's side, prattling on and pressing a hand against the magician's forehead. The visitor ignored him.

"Indeed," confirmed the visitor. "I have been following your tour since Worcester, waiting for this opportunity to . . . meet you."

"Good lord, Harry," exclaimed Hardeen. "Your fever is raging!" Neither Houdini nor the visitor paid him any mind.

"So who are you then?" demanded Houdini. "Some offended fakir, come to set the record straight? I've seen your kind in Port Said. You all perform as if you learned at the same school." Houdini finally acknowledged his frantic companion. "Blast it, Hardeen, fetch the orderly!"

The oblivious Hardeen drew his hand back, suspicion playing over his face. "Harry, who are you talking to?"

Houdini was growing agitated. He thrust a trembling hand at his visitor, snarling at Hardeen. "Are you blind? I'm being berated by this damned Turk!"

The visitor's taut lips bent into a frown. "I assure you, Houdini, that I am not a Turk." He leaned over the foot of the bed. "I am Magic. I am the *old* magic. The *real* magic."

"*Real* magic?" barked Houdini, ignoring his recoiling brother. "Hah! I've sought your 'real magic' all over the world," he growled. "I've hunted fairies in Cottingley. I've challenged a man who could see through steel. I've met women who could manifest ectoplasmic spirits from their ears. And do you know what I found every time?"

Hardeen continued to babble and clutched his brother's shoulder, unheeded.

"Nothing! Mere frauds and flim-flam! Cheesecloth ghosts, double exposures, and parlor tricks! That's your 'real magic'."

Hardeen shook his brother's shoulder, desperate for his attention. "Harry, listen," he pleaded. "There's no one else here!"

Houdini's next barb died in his throat. He faced his brother, but his confused eyes continued to move back and forth between Hardeen and the gaunt visitor.

"What are you saying?" he asked, his voice thin.

Hardeen moved down the bed, backing towards the visitor. "It's just you and me here, Harry," he insisted. "We're the only people in this room—"

Hardeen threw out his arms to fill the empty air. As he did so, his left arm passed over Houdini's feet and struck the cloth-draped package sitting there with a metallic jangle, nearly knocking it over.

Hardeen yanked his hand back as if the black shape had been a viper, and stared vaguely at the object, frozen in terror. The visitor merely scowled in minor irritation. After a moment, Hardeen blindly thrust his arms back out toward the object. The visitor calmly ran his finger through the loop and plucked the package off the bed, holding it out of harm's way.

As Hardeen dumbly groped around Houdini's feet, the visitor turned to address the magician. "Our time grows short, Great Houdini, and is not to be wasted on this one." The visitor thrust three fingers toward Hardeen's face, nearly touching his eyes.

"*Iu āq ā. Khakh p sa em rert,*" spoke the visitor.

Suddenly Hardeen shot upright. He turned to Houdini, his eyes unfocused. "Just hold on, Harry. I'm going to fetch Dr. Kennedy."

Houdini could barely speak. "Yes," he agreed, numbly. "Yes, get the doctor." A moment later Hardeen had fled from the room. Both men watched him go, then turned back to regard each other.

"Why couldn't he see you?" whispered Houdini. "Was he right? Have I gone mad?"

"Far from it, Great Houdini. I have used an incantation. It is the *old* magic. Magic of such power such has not been seen for millennia. Here I have closed the eyes of ignorant men. Such is but one of the ways I may cloak my passing."

"Who are you?" Houdini whispered. Never before had his voice held such fear.

"I have been following your career for quite a few years, Great Houdini. Your quest to uncover the true magic has amused me most greatly."

Houdini's breaths were shallow. "Where? Where have we met before?"

"How sad that you have spent the last decade of your life searching in vain for the secrets of the afterlife. How sad that your Spiritualists have shown you nothing but one charlatan after another. It is a most shameful state of affairs. But then, you were always drawn to those who sought to gain fame with their talents. True power needs no such flattery."

"Where, damn you," hissed Houdini, his cheeks flushed. "Where have I seen you before?"

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The wizened visitor sat down in Hardeen's vacated chair. "I have also been very amused by your writings, Great Houdini," he continued. "There is power in writing, you know. I have collected all of your books and articles. I have even read of your adventures in the *Weird Tales* magazine." The visitor leaned in close to Houdini. He smelled of cinnamon. "I was particularly amused by the tale you called, 'Imprisoned with the Pharaohs'."

Houdini's skin tightened. For a moment, he forgot to breathe. Eventually he cleared his dry throat, and said, "That story wasn't *true*, you know . . ." His voice trembled. "I didn't even write it. I just sold the idea."

The visitor leaned back. "Oh, this I know. Your ghostwriter thought very little of your idea, in fact. He researched your account and found many lies and errors. Truly, he speaks of you in the most unkind of terms. You have kept your secrets hidden very well."

The visitor leaned closer. "Before I relinquish the secret of my name, it is time for you to relinquish *your* secret, at long last. In your long quest to discover the true magic, Great Houdini, what did you find? What did you find, beyond the charlatans such as yourself?"

Houdini's face hardened, and his voice regained some measure of strength. "I found *nothing*."

"You found nothing? You found no hint of the afterlife? And yet you give your wife clues so that she may know you when your ghost is called up to dance for her. We both know that you *lie*, Houdini. Tell me. When you sought the secrets of the afterlife, *tell me* what you found in their stead."

The visitor held up his gnarled, bony hand. "It is all right, Houdini. You break no vow by answering. You expose no innocent to danger. You enlighten no villain to the lures of corruption. I already know your reply; I know it better than anyone who has ever lived."

"I found," began Houdini. His voice faded away as he weighed his answer. "I found . . . the *Red Death!*"

"Yes," grinned the visitor, his voice sighing with satisfaction. "That which is known by many names. But when I first allowed its entrance into the world, it had no name."

Houdini frowned. "But that can't be. The Red Death is ancient; it—"

"Ancient?" the visitor interrupted. "Great Houdini, *I* was ancient when Moses led your people across the Sea of Reeds."

Houdini merely gaped.

"Tell me, Great Houdini," continued the visitor, "of your trip through the Suez sixteen years ago. Tell me of this trip that took you to my land of Egypt. Tell me of the Englishmen you met in your hotel at Port Said . . ."

Houdini's eyes began to widen. "The Trelawny Expedition. They invited me to return with them to Cairo, and visit their excavation at Saqqara."

"Yes," smiled the visitor. "Your body is frail, but your mind remains sharp to the end. Tell me more of this expedition. Tell me what you found at Saqqara, in the shadow of the pyramid of Djoser."

"It was a tomb. Some vast, stone tomb that had been swallowed by the desert. They were looking for some early pharaoh—"

The visitor nodded. "That is what *most* of the Englishmen were looking for, yes. But that is not what you found, is it? Tell me what you found in that long-buried tomb."

"I was only there for one day—"

"—Oh, but what a day it was! Tell me what you found within those tunnels." The visitor started to slowly reach for his dark glasses.

"Traps . . . deadfalls . . . the burial chamber . . . a sealed sarcophagus."

"Did you open that sarcophagus, carved from a single block of translucent alabaster?"

"Yes," hissed Houdini, paralyzed with fear.

"And there did you find the old magic?" asked the visitor.

"Yes," whispered Houdini.

"Did you look upon the body which lay within?"

"Yes."

"Tell me, Great Houdini," pressed the visitor, removing his glasses. "What did you think when I first opened my eyes?"

"So it *is* you . . ." Houdini moaned. "*Imhotep*."

"Ah," sighed the living corpse, its eyes shriveled to yellowish pebbles. "So you *do* know the secret of my name." The creature's smile faded. "When Netjerikhet died, the pharaoh you know as Djoser, my failures opened our world to the Red Death." Imhotep held out his hand a few inches above Houdini's abdomen. "It turned my pharaoh into a horror, but the Red Death is much like your disease. It was weak in the beginning, contained. Few even knew that it existed, and they kept it secret, hoping it would fade with time. But I knew that time would only allow it to fester and spread. Under Djoser's successor Sekhemkhet I labored to reverse my error. Just as the pyramid of Djoser had admitted the Red Death, this new construction would have imprisoned it for all of eternity."

"Had the gods given me another twenty years to work," Imhotep said, closing his fist where it hung over Houdini's stomach, "I could have cut away the sickness."

"Instead I was given only six. Ignorant, fearful fools learned of the true purposes of my construction. Fools already poisoned by the Red Death. My new pharaoh's own soldiers turned against him, slaying him. My own priests turned against me, sealing me within the unfinished pyramid of Sekhemkhet."

"For millennia I lay trapped by my own enchantments, sealed within a stone crevice scarcely larger than

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myself. The Red Death claimed me just as it had claimed Djoser. My death brought no end to my agony. I lay helpless. I could not sleep. I could not dream. I had time enough to sink into the abyss of madness, and beyond. And as I lay sealed within that black hollow, your whole world grew, and the Red Death spread.”

Imhotep opened his hand, spreading his fingers wide. “Now I fear it is too late for such . . . *simple surgery* to save the patient.” Imhotep’s gaze snapped from Houdini’s abdomen to his face. “You are the world, Great Houdini. You both lie dying, killed by the unseen wound. Blind to your doom, until it is too late.”

A grim determination was beginning to sneak back into Houdini’s voice. “The world cannot be doomed. Not when there are still people left to defend it.”

Imhotep cackled. “Yes, I have seen your defenders. You freed me just in time to see the end of your ‘Golden Era’. Where are your defenders now? Thieves rule your cities, and monsters lurk in high houses. Just today one of your tyrants was attacked. The tyrant remains unscathed, and the boy who attacked him was slain by a mob. Your defenders have been reduced to children who lie dead in the streets. Forces beyond even your comprehension are working to rule this world. Forces which have been at work for many years. Even your own doctors and the secret serum they have injected into your veins hide a sinister past. Note that you are one of the few men left alive who even knows of the Trelawny Expedition. The desert sands have swallowed its memory, just as they have again swallowed my tomb.”

“There was an oath of secrecy . . .”

“There was an *incantation*, offered by a traitor among you. One who knew that you would find no obscure pharaoh within that tomb. One who knew exactly what you *would* find. She had searched for me for seven years. I was her most precious secret.

“For sixteen years after fleeing that tomb, you have sought in vain to rediscover the ancient magic you saw within. To find some hope for the soul of this world, untainted by mortal fools or formless evil. Now I have come at last to give you what you seek. There is power in names, you know. It is good that you know my true name, just as I know *your* true name, Ehrich Weiss.”

Imhotep rose from the chair, returning to the foot of the bed. He lay a withered hand on the draped package. “When one knows a man’s true name, one may even reach out and pluck the *ka* from his breast.”

Houdini’s eyes narrowed. “Is that why you’ve come at last? To take my life?”

Imhotep frowned. “You will surrender it soon enough,” he crackled. “When death is inevitable, there is no need for hurry. I lay unmoving throughout all of your history. A year, a decade, a century; these are nothing to me. No, Ehrich Weiss. I have not come to take your

life.” Imhotep lifted the cloth away from his covered package, revealing an ornate wire birdcage.

“I have merely come to take your soul.”

Houdini gaped. “But, why?”

Imhotep regarded him dispassionately. “Your heart holds many secrets, Ehrich Weiss. You have been wise to hold those secrets close. But the dead are weak, and there are many who would have the power to bend your tattered ghost to their will. Your secrets could greatly further the plans of the Red Death . . . or unseat them. I cannot allow your secrets to run free.”

Houdini squeezed his eyes tightly shut. “Do not fear,” consoled Imhotep. “After all, you *are* the Great Houdini! Are you not the greatest magician of all time? Perhaps you will escape the cage I have made for you. Perhaps this world will escape the cage the Red Death has made for it.” Imhotep hovered at Houdini’s side. “It took me four thousand, five hundred and fifty-three years to escape my tomb. I’m sure you will fare better.” Imhotep reached out to touch Houdini’s heart.

Houdini’s eyes snapped open. He glared up at the talking corpse. “Wait.” His voice was strangely calm. “Just tell me this. Were you freed in time to witness the end of the golden era? Or to destroy it?”

Imhotep paused. “This is your final request?” There was a commotion in the hall.

“Yes,” sighed Houdini. “Just answer this: Why have you come to claim me? Are you a foe of the Red Death? Or a servant?” The doctors rushed in.



“Well, Harry,” Hardeen murmured, “now you really are a magician among the spirits.” He stood at the window, his mind adrift. Suddenly his eye was caught by an old man in the street below, carrying a birdcage out to the idling sedan. The old man’s cage danced in the gusting winds of the looming storm, and for just a moment the whipping winds lifted the black drapes from around the bars, revealing the creature within. For just a moment, Hardeen caught a distant glimpse of the tiny, fluttering bird beating its wings against the wires.

And for just a moment, Hardeen thought the bird’s face looked uncannily like that of his brother.



BOOK OF SECRETS: CREDITS

DANIEL BANDERA

Mocellus ☠ Zardorus ☠ Weresnake
Pirata Salinas ☠ Isaac Bennington
Big Game Hunter Kit

I would like to thank the Kargatane for accepting my articles for another of their great Ravenloft netbooks. Inspiration for this year's articles came from a variety of places. *Isaac Bennington* & the *Big Game Hunter*—He was inspired by watching a story on the Discovery channel about tigers. The show related the hunting practices in India of the British (using white sheets to herd the tigers to the hunters). I have always liked tigers, and see that inspired me to create a tiger's revenge on one of these hunters. *Pirata Salinas (El diablo del mar)*—He came about from a vacation a few years ago to Cozumel. I was there to do some scuba diving and there were two local dive masters that lead our group each day. The two dive masters were named Pirata (Yep that was really his name) and Polo. While there, we changed Polo to Pollo, and would call him "El pollo del mar," the chicken of the sea. It was easy to make the jump that they were weresharks if you see how easy these guys could move through the water. *Weresnake*—Inspired from another show on the Discovery channel. *Zardorus*—The dubious mage was inspired from reading *The Complete Book of Necromancers*. I was surprised at the time that the book was not a Ravenloft product, as much of it fits the demiplane.

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JOE BARDALES

Kargatane

Professor Dora Meltzer

Sherlock Holmes and the Red Death II

Joe would like to dedicate his *Book of Secrets* articles this year to the die-hard fans of *Masque of the Red Death*, with whom he shares impeccable taste in RPGs. He eagerly awaits another visit from his fellow Kargatane, and can be found by the fire at the Slaughtered Lamb Pub sipping the very essence of the Red Death. He'll be the one that reeks of wolfsbane. If you're ever in the neighborhood, drop in and raise a glass!

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BIL BOOZER

The Haunted Cairn

Bil Boozer has been a college administrator at Georgia State University for over a decade. On a daily basis, he must battle with the modern horror known as "bureaucracy." In his spare time, he much prefers gothic horror, where the only things to be feared are the supernatural and the Church.

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TIMOTHY S. BRANNAN

Hæmogoblin

Tim lives in Illinois, home of the psychotic squirrels which were the inspiration for the Hæmogoblin (don't ask). When not working, Tim spends his time reading, working on his various websites, and spends time trying to convince people that his 6 year old 486 Gateway2000 computer can "still kick butt!" Tim also writes "Custom Configurations," a monthly internet article on repairing and upgrading personal computers. Currently Tim is preparing himself for the ultimate of horrors, fatherhood! His dark spawn is due in November.

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CHARLES BROWN

Kargatane

Bleeding Willow ☠ Ring of the Wolf

Charles Brown was first brought into the world of horror by picking up an original release of the *Deities and Demigods* book that still had the Cthulhu Mythos included. Since then he has been an avid fan of the genre, and fell in love with the RAVENLOFT setting on first sight (it has since been ousted by the Gothic Earth setting as favorite game world). He plans to soon investigate another form of horror, that of marriage...

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LEYSHON CAMPBELL

Merilee Markuza

Our investigation continues to discover whether "Leyshon Campbell" is just another pen name of the nefarious Merilee Markuza...

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BOOK OF SECRETS: CREDITS

ANDREW CERMAK

Lights in the Fog

Whew! For awhile, I wasn't sure I was going to get "Lights in the Fog" finished before the deadline... and I had started it before *The Book of Sorrows* came out.

Speedy Gonzales I'm not.

I'd like to dedicate this article to the members of the Kargat, past and present, for their hard work on a setting that gave me so much pleasure, and to the Kargatane, for the hard work still to come.

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ERIC C. DANIEL

Azalin's Crown

The mists covered the town of Vallaki in a shroud of white. The people stayed in their homes, afraid to come out and face whatever may lay within the gloom. All was quiet, but not all was still. A single figure was moving through the streets, as silent and as dark as a shadow. The figure paused by a certain door, reached into its coat pocket with one ebon-gloved hand, and retrieved a parchment package. Stooping momentarily, it slipped the package under the front entry of the bookshop and then walked on. If anyone had been there to witness this, they may have heard the figure chuckle to itself as it disappeared into the mists, "I hope they put this bit to good use."

With a final snort, it vanished into the mists.

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LUIS DE PIPPO

A Darkling by Any Other Name

I would like to dedicate the article to a friend who has never let me down, Claudio Garcia, and also to a pair of high-school friends, Martin Caceres and Mariano Tarres, who playtested some of the darklings, to their everlasting pain. I hope the Ravenloftian DM will be able to use the new Darklings to terrify those players who read every *Monstrous Compendium* and know what every monster does.

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MARK "MORTAVIUS"

GRAYDON

Nature's Sorrow

Figurines of Obsession

Well, my masters have let me out of my cell for a few scant hours today, because of the hard work that I have performed for them. That's good news, because I was starting to get worried about the Tentacled Thing in the Vase...it seemed to be getting hungry...again. Perhaps in these few hours I'll be able to find some inspiration for my next mad ramblings? Or at least some food for the Tentacled Thing...

On a more serious note, being the Senior Monitor for the Ravenloft Mailing List has really been great, and I look forward to it in the years to come. All of you on the Mailing List have been great, through thick and thin. And I thank all the people who enjoyed my work in this Netbook, it's for you that I wrote them.

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ANDREW HACKARD

Kargatane

Fortune Telling for the Faint of Heart

Andrew has recently moved from Texas (fourth domain in the Steaming Lands cluster) to British Columbia to begin his Ph.D. in mathematics. He's still getting used to people running around in shorts while he complains about the bitter cold. Andrew dedicates his articles this year to the past and present designers of the RAVENLOFT line, who have provided many hours of enjoyment over the last decade. He feels that the future of RAVENLOFT is just as bright as the past, and looks forward to taking a role in guiding the setting he loves.

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BOOK OF SECRETS: CREDITS

ANDREW HAUPTMAN

Abber Nomads ☠ Freak Kit

Andrew Hauptman is 31 years old, and is now entering his seventh year as a NYC public school teacher. He's leaving the classroom to explore the unknown territory of the music teacher—wish him luck! He is an avid comic book reader and gamer, and an active member of the RPGA. He has published six AD&D tournaments for the RPGA, including one RAVENLOFT and three Living Death (MotRD) scenarios, and also two articles in the RPGA's *Polyhedron* Newszine (also about the Living Death campaign). He has also contributed articles to *The Book of Souls* and *Book of Sorrows*, which were published online by the dread Kargatane.

In what he laughingly refers to as his "spare time," Andrew spends entirely too many hours sitting at his computer indulging his online addiction, which probably explains why he hasn't produced an RPGA tournament in over a year. He also tries on occasion to catch up with his ever-growing "List of Books to Read Before I Die."

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NICK HERAS

Vampiric Virus

I dedicate this article to the dedicated work of the Kargatane, Kargat and all Ravenloft fans who contribute to the setting's continued success.

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DEREK HOLLAND

Topiary Golem

Mr. Holland offered to send us his dedication just as soon as he found his way out of our hedge maze. Mind you, that was three days ago; if he hasn't reached the exit yet, he probably won't anytime soon...

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MARK JACKMAN

Carnagan Wolfe

Having spent the past 11 years interested in devilish creatures of one sort or another, ever since he first played the old Nintendo game "Monster Party", Mark's knowledge of the occult has grown steadily, much to his family's dismay.

About a year ago, the Mists of Ravenloft rose up to claim this young soul.

I would like to thank my family and friends for encouraging my imagination. My brother Stephen was the one who came up with the first name, Carnagan, which is still one of the weirdest first names I've ever heard (uh ... no offense if that is your first name). Finally, I would like to thank my friend Karen, for having the patience to sit and quietly listen to my inane ramblings about goblins and ghouls, and other creatures that walk the shadows.

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JALEIGH JOHNSON

Beauty's Garden

Beauty's Garden was inspired by my ongoing fascination with Fairy- and Folk tales, past and present versions. This piece puts a sinister spin on aspects of the Beauty and the Beast tale. Let's face it, sometimes the beast really is a monster, and roses do have their thorns... at least in Ravenloft. If you liked the fiction that went along with it, have a peek at my website.

(<http://www.angelfire.com/or/OnyxV/index.html>) It's part of my other ongoing obsession to be a good writer, or at least a fairly good storyteller. My entry is dedicated to my parents and to all the guys... you know who you are. A girl couldn't ask for a better gaming group, or better friends. And a big thanks to the Kargatane for all the work they put into these netbooks. You are true professionals in the art of terror, madness, and other ghastly things.

jaleigh@atwood-il.com

KURT A. JOHNSON

Chimney Sweep Kit

I have trouble taking credit for the Sweep. For years I have been haunted by those special words spoken by Bert in Disney's *Mary Poppins*. As such, when I discovered *Masque of the Red Death*, the Sweep simply leaped out of my mind and into the game. I dedicate the character to that humble hero who rescued the King so long ago.

kurt63@altavista.net

RENE LITTEK

Lesser Breeds of the Arak II

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It would seem that their latest expedition to the Shadow Rift has left Pale Uneveneyes out of touch. It would be a shame to lose the opportunity for more information on that pit...

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JARROD R. LOWE

The Sword of the Clan ApBlanc

Jarrold R. Lowe was born in Kentucky on the banks of the Mighty Tug River during the year 1976. He hopes that his article can enhance the already wonderful Castles Forlorn boxed set which inspired the weapon.

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BEETO LYLE

Wayward on the Bone Sands

This article was inspired by the essay, “A Modest Proposal For Preventing The Children of Poor People in Ireland From Being A Burden to Their Parents or Country, and For Making Them Beneficial to The Public,” by Jonathon Swift. I would like to thank Bob Geis, Jason Greenwood, Keith Keiser, and Brad Lile for their invaluable contributions as players in the first “Wayward on the Bone Sands” game. Special thanks are due to Mr. Geis for encouraging me to submit the article to *The Book of Secrets*, and for posing the insightful question, “Have you ever bitten into a gnome?”

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JEAN-F. MAJOR

Romeo Giacomo Galli

I first thought of Romeo when I read the “Red Tide” adventure from the *Masque of the Red Death* boxed set. The whole

adventure seemed perfect, except for one point: After all the comics and TV children shows about it, I was afraid that Dracula would incite more laughter than sheer horror in my players. So, I needed a replacement vampire. Then, I used an old technique I read back in the Ravenloft black box, I think:

Take values that are very important to you (love, elegance, gallantry) and twist them to make a truly mad villain. I think in this case, it worked pretty well, and after many *many* problems (not to say many bruised bones and torture sessions by Kargatane members) I’m glad to be able to share this character with all of you.

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JOHN W. MANGRUM

Kargatane

Framing Fiction

Anchors of Faith

Carnival: The Ballyhoo

Well, hopefully this year’s framing fiction will finally determine whether you guys are supposed to take the Vallaki Kargatane seriously or not! Don’t worry, we’ll put them back in their closet now; I can spell “over-exposure” as well as the next guy. I would like to acknowledge my primary factual sources for the Houdini framing tale: *Houdini!!! The Career of Ehrich Weiss*, by Kenneth Silverman, and *Chronicle of the Pharaohs*, by Peter A. Clayton. Frighteningly enough, virtually every side detail in that story is in fact true. “Anchors of Faith” only came about through the contributions of other folks; I thank them for all their help in that article, and I’d just like to thank them again. As for “Carnival: The Ballyhoo,” I hope everyone enjoys Carnival, and maybe I’ll get the right opportunity to reveal Pharaoh Rottentop yet. See you next year!

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STEVE MILLER

On the Road 🐉 Eleni of Toyalis

Steve Miller has been DMing or playing RAVENLOFT since shortly after the setting’s release in 1990. For the past five years, he has been working on the line as a developer, designer, and editor, first for TSR and more recently for Wizards of the

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Coast. His contributions to the Kargatane netbooks are dedicated to all the RAVENLOFT fans, whose excitement for the world and its characters make being part of it such a joy.

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LES MOZINGO

Seradan

I would like to dedicate Seradan to James Lowder first and foremost, as he's the reason I am hooked on Ravenloft, and Amanda Dragonette, who helped me think it out.

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CHRISTOPHER DALE NICHOLS

Kargatane

What? You let him go to Aisle Five? Yes, I know the burgomeister's mess had to be cleaned up, but Holder never has his mind on things when he's just received a new scroll. Oh well, I guess if he's still in one piece he'll turn up for dinner.

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CHARLES PHIPPS

Cyran Devichi

Wolfgang Armand Faust

I'd like to dedicate this book to God since it is only a miracle I got Cyran and Faust published with my grammar. Thanks to him and the Kargatane for making this possible. I'm glad I was honored with the chance to be the one to put Mephistopheles' spawn into print on Gothic Earth.

Hopefully I'll be able to do up the Lilan for the next Kargatane NPC project!

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WES SCHNEIDER

The Knox Clan ☠ Echo

A four hundred year old lich inhabiting the body of a student at Towson University in Maryland, "Wes" has been passing his immortality by feeding off the fear and terror he creates in his host's friends and family by introducing them to horror

roleplaying. Though this brings intense enjoyment, he has found that fear can be even sweeter when shared with someone with an equally dark soul.

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"KALIAS TRIVUNE, THE MAD BARD OF ALFHEIM"

Van Richten's Guide to the Mists

Kalias would like to thank himself, for without him, he would have never gotten Anywhere. But now, since he's in Avonleigh which is closer to Nowhere than Any Other Place, he'd like to give his special thanks to Matthew Barrett for presenting this concept in the first place and allowing him to "expand upon" it.

He's also like to thank the Ravenloft-L Mailing List for their constant appearance in his mailbox, the Weathermay Sisters for their twin support and devotion, and the Gentleman Caller for reasons unknown...

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STUART TURNER

Kargatane

A Year in Ravenloft

Ardonk Szerieza

The Effigy of Ivan Szimin

A lot has happened in the past year for both the Kargatane and Ravenloft. I've met three of my fellow editors, visited Wizards of the Coast in Seattle, we've been made the official site, and as of next year the future of Ravenloft has been placed squarely in our hands. As a result, the release of *The Book*

of Secrets feels somewhat like the end of the Kargatane's childhood, as we grow from being a bunch of fans on the net into a real web publisher.

I hope and believe that this netbook shows that as long as the fans continue to support this setting, Ravenloft will live on. My thanks go to those in WotC who have given us this opportunity, and for having faith in our ability to carry the coffin for them.

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"TYKUS THE GLADIATOR"

Inesko Krolov

Inesko was actually inspired by the Jimmy Upton entry in *Children of the Night: Ghosts*. I always liked the idea of creatures and NPCs that appeared to be one thing and were completely different. The author would like to say that he can truly understand madness checks even better now that he has to

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make one every day (maybe even more than once) when he goes to work in one of those strange asylums that deal with substance abuse for kids.

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PIERRE "GOMEZ" VAN ROODEN

Gundar

My original entry for Gundar was inspired by a historical figure—Grote (Big) Pier, a Frysian rebel hero and a popular 'villain' in the Dutch television show *Floris* (with Rutger Hauer). The eventual duke turned out quite different, but traces of Pier can still be found in his background, for those who know where to look.

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ANDREW WYATT

Inquisitor ☠ Chiurgeon

Wretched Creations

The Sons of Liberty

Kostrzyn Lubartow finds this Barovian bookshop intriguing, but entirely too morbid for his tastes. Since that clerk over there is looking at him with a predatory gleam, Kostrzyn decides to duck out and return to the Lonesome Road (<http://come.to/lonesomeroad>).

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